

S E R M O N S

ON THE

Following SUBJECTS:

VIZ.

Of the universal sense of good and evil.

The characters of the righteous and good man compared; or benevolence the noblest branch of social virtue.

The perfection of the Christian scheme of benevolence; in answer to the objection from its not having particularly recommended private friendship, and the love of our country.

Of the image of God in man; or the excellency of human nature.

God not an arbitrary being.

Of the abuses of free-thinking.

Of Mysteries.

Agur's prayer; or the middle condition of life, generally, the most eligible.

The mischiefs of slavish complaisance, and cowardice.

Rules for the profitable reading the Holy Scriptures.

Of Heresy.

Of Schism.

Of the pleasures of a religious life.

Religion founded on reason, and the right of private judgment.

The evidence of a future state, on the principles of reason and revelation, distinctly consider'd.

The nature, folly, and danger of scoffing at religion.

By JAMES FOSTER, D. D.

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S E R-



S E R M O N I.

Of the universal sense of good and evil.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

*And as he reasoned of righteousness,
temperance, and judgment to come,
Felix trembled.-----*



HERE is nothing more use- SERM.
ful and instructive than to I.
acquaint ourselves with the
history of mankind, especially
in their moral conduct: This gives us a
true knowledge of human nature, of the
various workings of its passions, and the
principles by which it is influenced. And
observations grounded on *fact* are certain

SERM. and indisputable ; whereas *abstract specu-*

I. *lations* may not only differ very much, but are liable to be disputed, and more easily perplexed or evaded. Besides, a small piece of history affords a greater variety of incidents for the improvement of our minds, and the right conduct of life, than can be suggested, within the same compass, in the way of *instruction* and *reasoning* : This will more fully appear by considering the particular transaction between *Paul* and *Felix*, of which the text is a part.

FELIX*, by the confession of *Tacitus* the Roman historian, governed the *Jews* in a very arbitrary manner, and committed the grossest acts of *oppression* and *tyranny*.

Joseph.
Ant. l. xx.
c. 5.

And *Drusilla* his wife, without any good reason to justify a divorce, had left her former husband, and given herself to him ; and consequently was an *adulteress* : When *St. Paul*, therefore, was sent for

* Claudius defunctis regibus, Judæam provinciam equitibus Romanis aut libertis permisit ; è quibus Antonius Felix, per omnem sævitiam ac libidinem, jus regium fervili ingenio exercuit. *Histor. lib. v. c. 9.*

At non frater ejus cognomento *Felix* pari moderatione agebat, jam pridem Judææ impositus, & cuncta malefacta sibi impune ratus, tanta potentia subnixo. *Annal. xii. 54.*

to

to explain to them the nature of the SERM.
 Christian Religion, which was then new- I.
 ly published, and, upon that account, a
 matter of *curiosity*; and in discoursing
 on the morality of the gospel, which is
 the most important and essential part of
 it (as it must be of every revelation that
 is really of divine original) took occasion
 to inculcate the eternal laws of justice,
 and the immutable obligations of tem-
 perance and chastity; the conscience of
 the governour was alarmed and terrified,
 and a sense of his crime, and dread of
 the righteous and awful judgment of
 God upon all such notorious offenders
 against the rules of *righteousness* and *hu-*
manity, filled him with the utmost con-
 fusion. *Drusilla* indeed does not appear
 to have discovered any remorse; perhaps
 she was, naturally, of a more hard, insen-
 sible, unrelenting temper; or confided in
 her *Jewish* privileges, and expected to
 be saved, as a daughter of *Abraham*, not-
 withstanding the immorality and wick-
 edness of her life. However this be, as
 'tis not my business to make conjectures,
 I shall proceed to consider what is direct-
 ly related by the historian, *viz.* that, as
 Paul

SERM. Paul *reasoned of righteousness, temperance,*

I. *and judgment to come, Felix trembled:*

only premising, that the impresson, which the Apostle's discourse made upon his mind, did not spring from any thing in his *peculiar* circumstances, but from the *general frame* of human nature, and principles that are common to all mankind; and consequently that the moral reflections, naturally arising from it, must be of *universal* concern. And,

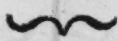
1st. WE learn from this history, that there is, even in the worst of men, a *natural conscience* of good and evil, which in very few, if any, instances, is entirely extinguished. It may be darkened, perverted, and very much defaced, but is hardly ever quite obliterated and lost. There are certain seasons, which check the insolence of the passions, and dispose for gravity and consideration, in which it *revives*; and represents the malignity of irregular and vitious excesses in a clear and strong light.

INDEED the advocates for vice and licentiousness have, sometimes, gone so far, as to represent all our notions of
right

right and wrong as the effects of *education*, *custom*, *superstition*, and the like; but this evidently shews, that they are men of very little knowledge of human nature; and of narrow observation: For let them fix on any instance of real and undoubted superstition they please, and let them examine all ages, and histories; and they will never find, tho' it was ever so plausible, and managed with the utmost art and dexterity, that it had such a *steady* and *universal* influence as notions of morality. The *weak* and *unthinking*, and persons of a *suspicious*, *gloomy* temper, may be persuaded to look upon it as sacred, and drawn into a stiff attachment to it; but the more *judicious* have secretly despis'd it; and it was never known to take, universally, as a thing of real excellency and importance in itself, with men of all *capacities*, *inclinations*, and *interests*.

AGAIN, by the use of proper arguments, a man may convince great multitudes of the absurdity and folly of any *established superstition*, and form a strong party against it; but let him use the utmost sophistry to confound all distinction between *virtue* and

SERM. and *vice*, to prove that there is no difference

I.  rence between just and unjust, beneficence and cruelty, that fraud and oppression, adultery and murder, have nothing criminal in them, but what is owing to the *arbitrary* determination of the world, or the juggles of *priests* and *politicians*; let him attempt, I say, to establish so monstrous a scheme with ever so much craft and subtilty, he will make but few proselytes; nay, nor even be able to impose on himself so far, however he may perplex and puzzle his understanding, as to be firmly established in such a wild opinion, without having, at any time, *uneasy suspicions*, and some mixtures of *jealousy* and *distrust*.

ADD to this, that the *wisest*, in all ages, those who have discovered the greatest strength and compass of reason, have had the most large and refined sentiments of morality, and urged the strictest regard to it in all its parts. And finally, that those who differed most about external rites, and particular forms of superstition, have *unanimously* agreed in asserting the sacredness of moral obligations,

gations, and in all the essential and mo-
mentous branches of virtue. All which, I.
taken together, is the strongest presump-
tion imaginable, that the universal sense
of good and evil, which appears among
mankind, is a *natural* principle; and has
not its foundation in *fancy* and *enthu-
siasm*.

BUT to come more directly to the
point. All the obligations of morality
approve themselves, upon examination, to
our best and purest reason: And this
single circumstance proves, undeniably,
that they spring from the nature of
things; and whereas it holds true of all
kinds of superstition, that they will not
stand an exact and critical inquiry, are
best liked when they are least understood,
most successfully propagated in times of
ignorance and implicit faith, and lose
ground in more judicious and inquisi-
tive ages; the quite contrary may be said
of the rules of virtue, which, the more
narrowly they are canvassed, their au-
thority appears by so much the more
unquestionable: The mind, the more it
considers and argues about them, is the
more

SERM. more fully convinced of their importance.

I. Nothing does the cause of virtue so much service, or makes it appear with such dignity and lustre, as bringing it to the test of *a good understanding*: as an evidence of which, it has, in fact, been always most cultivated, and held in the highest esteem, in the most *knowing* and *civilized* nations, where those ingenious and liberal arts, which adorn and polish human life, have flourished in their greatest perfection.

BUT even this is not all. For because the decisions of reason are *slow*, formed by a train of deductions and inferences, which all are not equally capable of; and if notions of morality were only to be acquired this way, the good effect would too frequently be obstructed by various causes, preventing the right exercise of our rational faculties, in some by *the cares of life*, in others by *indolence*; upon these accounts, I say, there seems to be implanted in our nature a kind of *sense* of good and evil, an *immediate perception*, without any intervening train of reasoning, of the amiableness and beauty of
of

of virtue, and the deformity of vice. SERM.

And this I take to be what is most properly meant by *natural conscience*; which, however it may be corrupted and obscured by sensual passions, and, for a time, controuled by strong prejudices, and inveterate habits of vice, the worst of men can't entirely get rid of. And, undoubtedly, it is an excellent provision of the God of nature, and an undeniable proof of his wisdom and goodness in the formation of mankind; not only as 'tis a constant incentive to honourable, virtuous, and useful actions, and a more *expeditious, universal, and vigorous* principle than the mere cool and abstract dictates of reason; but as it may always be a means of reforming offenders, and does not leave their recovery *quite desperate*, tho' they have gone great lengths in vice and disorder; or, at least, in many cases, checks the irregular excesses of their passions, and *limits* their extravagancies, which might, otherwise, occasion greater confusion in the world, and be much more injurious to the general interests of societies.

Of the universal sense

SERM.

I SHALL only add, that as it appears, I. from the example in the text, that bad men are sometimes struck with terror on account of their vices, and fully convinced of their unreasonable nature, and pernicious consequences, but soon wear off the impression, and continue their evil practices without being at all reformed; we learn from hence, how strangely a course of habitual wickedness *captivates* and *enslaves* the mind: It is held in such strong fetters, that the sinner has not resolution enough to return to the paths of virtue, tho' reason and interest both demand it; nor to abandon his vices, notwithstanding he is persuaded that they are a source of reproach and dishonour, and have a direct tendency to misery and ruin. Such a state of servitude, in which our *noblest* faculties, our *intellectual* and *moral* powers, are entirely subjected to sense and appetite, is the lowest and most melancholy depravation of human nature; most *ignominious* in itself, and *fatal* in its effects.

2dly. We may observe, from the text, what a miserable thing it is to have a
con-

conscience burthened with guilt, in that SERM.
a man dares not trust himself *to think*, for I.
fear of being alarmed, and filled with
terror and confusion. *Felix* does not
seem to have been at all prone to super-
stition ; or, in general, to have had any
troublesome sense of his crimes. The
flatteries of a court, and the amuse-
ments of grandeur and luxury, gave him
no time to cool ; and diverted all grave
and serious reflections. But when *St.*
Paul began to discourse to him of the
immutable obligations of justice, against
which he had been a most heinous of-
fender, he immediately saw the vileness
of his conduct, and *trembled* for the con-
sequences of it.

AND the case is very much the same
with such as indulge to any other kind
of vicious excess. As long as they are
amus'd with company, or engag'd in a
hurry of business, or can keep their pas-
sions inflam'd, and silence the voice of
reason and natural conscience by a course
of intemperance, they may continue *stu-*
pid and *insensible*. But when any thing
happens that damps their gaiety, gives a
shock to the mind, and puts them upon

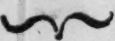
SERM. thinking, they are soon rouz'd out of

I. their *lethargy*, and entertain'd with none but *dark* and *gloomy* prospects. And nothing, surely, can be a more perverted state of Mankind, than to derive all their relief, all their peace, from the *suppression* or *extinction* of reason; not to be able to stand the deliberate judgment of their own minds, or bear those exercises of sedate and impartial reflection, which are their peculiar glory and happiness. Besides, as guilt is such an enemy to *consideration*, there is this dreadful circumstance attending it, farther to aggravate and enhance its misery, that it cuts off, in a great measure, *the only possible means* of the finners recovery.

3dly, IT is a very natural inference from the text, that inculcating the great duties of morality, and enforcing the practice of them from a regard to the future judgment, is true *Gospel preaching*; and answers, in the most effectual manner, the excellent design of Christianity. Indeed the reason of the thing itself demonstrates, that to promote universal purity, and strengthen the obligations of virtue, which are eternal and immutable, a conformity

formity to the moral perfections of God, SERM.
and the supreme rectitude and happiness I.
of human nature, must be the ultimate
view of every divine revelation. With-
out this, *faith* is no better than *infidelity*,
nor *orthodoxy* than *error*; and external
rites and solemnities of devotion, how-
ever dignified by a *civil* or *ecclesiastical*
authority, or even by a *divine* appoint-
ment, if they are consider'd as having an
intrinsic goodness, and substituted in the
room of the virtues of a holy life, are so
far from being parts of *true religion*,
that they degenerate into acts of the most
vile and impious *superstition*. And there-
fore if Christianity had, really, subvert-
ed, in any instance, the religion of nature,
or depreiated any essential branches of
morality; nay, indeed if it had not re-
presented them as of the first importance
to mankind, infinitely preferable to *spe-*
culations, *mysteries*, and alterable *forms*
and *modes* of worship; notwithstanding
the *pomp* of miracles, it would hardly
have prov'd itself, to a wise and judici-
ous enquirer, worthy of God, or useful
to the world.

SERM. TO PREACH CHRIST is uni-

I.  verſally allowed to be the duty of every Chriſtian miniſter. But what doth it mean? — 'Tis not to uſe his name as a charm, to work up our hearers to a warm pitch of *enthuſiaſm*, without any foundation of reaſon to ſupport it — 'Tis not to make his perſon and his offices incomprehenſible — 'Tis not to exalt *his* glory, as a kind condeſcending ſaviour, to the diſhonour of the ſupreme and unlimited goodneſs of the *creator* and *father* of the univerſe; who is repreſented as ſtern and inexorable, expreſſing no indulgence to his guilty creatures, but demanding full and rigorous ſatisfaction for their offences — 'Tis not to encourage *undue* and *preſumptuous* reliances on his merits and interceſſion, to the contempt of virtue and good works. No: But to repreſent him as a *lawgiver* as well as a ſaviour, as a *preacher of righteouſneſs*, as one who hath given us a moſt noble and complete ſyſtem of morals, enforc'd by the moſt ſubſtantial and worthy motives; and to ſhew, that the whole ſcheme of our redemption is *a doctrine according to godlineſs*.

THAT this is *preaching Christ* is evident, beyond all reasonable dispute, from the text, and the verse immediately preceding, where we are told, that Felix *sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ; and as, i. e. in explaining the faith, or doctrine, of Christ, he reason'd of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.* And this method bears the nearest conformity to our saviour's own example, whose whole sermon on the mount, the longest he ever preach'd, is entirely taken up in recommending *moral duties*; and the drift of almost all his parables is either to inculcate, in general, honesty and integrity of mind, or urge the practice of particular virtues, or discountenance and restrain prevailing and destructive vices. The sum of our duty, in the opinion of this divine instructor, consists in *the love of God, and of our neighbour*; and, according to St. James, *pure religion and undefil'd, before God, even the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* So that all those who decry moral virtue, which

SERM. is the supreme dignity of God himself,
 I. and inseparably connected with the happiness of all rational beings, as a thing of no avail towards obtaining the divine favour, and the privileges and rewards of Christianity, do, *in effect* (tho', I am persuaded, with a quite different design, even to exalt, instead of diminishing, the honour of the gospel) subvert the very fundamental principles both of natural and reveal'd religion.

AND from what has been said it appears, that to explain and press the eternal laws of morality is not only a truly Christian, but, beyond comparison, the most *useful* method of preaching. In this I include enforcing the rules of virtue by all the *peculiar* motives which the Christian religion suggests, and making all its doctrines subservient to holiness. There is a passage, in St. Paul's epistle to *Titus*, very particular, and strong to this purpose; *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believ'd in God might be careful to maintain good works; these things are good and profitable to men. They are of invariable importance; of*
universal

universal advantage ; and tend to ad-
vance the highest interests of human na-
ture in all ages, nations, and circum-
stances, and under every possible deno-
mination and form of true religion. To
cultivate in the minds of men a supreme
reverence and love of God, and promote
the mutual exercise of strict impartial
justice, generous and extensive benevo-
lence, meekness and condescension, peace-
ableness and humility, and a strict regard
to all the rules of chastity and tempe-
rance, is to make them most amiable in
themselves, useful to society, and the fa-
vourites of heaven.

BUT of what advantage is it to set
faith and reason at variance, and lay more
stress on *believing right*, which is a qua-
lification the most profligate and aban-
don'd may attain to (nay even *the de-
vils believe and tremble*) than on purity
of heart, and righteousness of life? —
Of what advantage is it to magnify the
grace of God, by disparaging and vili-
fying human nature, which is the *work*
of God ; by representing mankind as hav-
ing lost their noble powers of reason and
liberty, and, consequently, being altoge-

SERM.ther as incapable of religion as the

I. brute creatures? — What *end* does it answer to wrap religion up in *darkness*, and lay a great stress on the *incomprehensible subtilties* of *school-divinity*, but to confound weak understandings, make the ignorant conceited and censorious, and foment a spirit of uncharitableness and party-zeal? — What is the *use* of insisting on absolute and irreversible decrees, but to encourage *presumption*, or drive to *despair*? — Or in fixing the whole of our salvation on the righteousness of another imputed to us, and giving a despicable representation of the most exalted human virtues, unless it be to mortify the *best* of men, and slacken their diligence and zeal, and flatter the very *worst* in their vices?

I MAY add to what has been already said, that not only the recommending and inculcating, but *reasoning* about points of morality is of singular advantage, and the very best way to propagate the knowledge and practice of Christianity. Of this we have a plain example in the conduct of St. Paul, who is describ'd, in the text, as *reasoning*, with
Felix,

Felix, of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. And, indeed, the more of *reason* there appears in our religion, the brighter are the internal characters of its divine original. Men will be the more strongly dispos'd to obey it, when they are convinc'd that 'tis not impos'd by a mere *arbitrary* authority, but is excellent in itself, and conducive to their happiness. Besides, by this method we shall represent our duty in a greater variety of lights, to strike every passion, and suit it to all tempers and circumstances. So that whatever will not stand the test of free argument and enquiry can't be the religion of reasonable beings, nor proceed from a wise and beneficent governour; but is fit only for a TYRANT to enjoin, and SLAVES to submit to.

4. A SENSE of guilt makes those things the objects of *aversion* and *horror*, which, naturally, yield the highest delight and satisfaction. We have an instance, in the text, of one that was shock'd at the strict obligations of *justice*, without which there can be no pleasure, or convenience in human life, and the whole frame of civil societies

SERM. societies must, immediately, be dissolv'd.

I. It mortifies the epicure and the adulterer to be told of the rules of *temperance* and *chastity*, which are absolutely necessary to the health of our bodies, the rectitude and vigour of our minds, and the grand security of what is most dear and sacred to us; and the cruel and revengeful to hear of *gentleness*, *beneficence*, and the soft impressions of *humanity*, tho' they form the most excellent and amiable character we can possibly conceive of. Could we find a being, *originally*, form'd with such apprehensions of things, we should look upon it with detestation, and universally abhor the author of such a vile production. But yet our passions and prejudices so strangely deceive us, that we think more favourably of the pursuits of vice, which create many such MONSTERS; who would be glad to prove that the distinctions of good and evil were *fantastic* and *arbitrary*, and virtue and vice *mere empty names*; and, thereby, destroy the order and beauty of the whole moral creation of God.

IN like manner, the future judgment of mankind is, in itself, far from being
an

an object of *terror*. For that we are SERM.
moral accountable creatures is owing to I.
our superior capacities, which are the di-
stinguishing honour and dignity of our
nature; and nothing can be a more
comfortable reflection to a well-dispos'd
mind, than that its integrity will be tri-
ed and rewarded by a Being of unerring
wisdom, inflexible justice, and unlimit-
ed goodness. But, to a guilty sinner,
this is so tremendous a scene, that the
mere prospect of it fills him with agony
and confusion. He does not consider it
as *honourable* to human nature, because
it threatens his vices; can't think of a-
biding by the sentence of *unchangeable*
rectitude, and *infinite benevolence* itself;
and the sum of his wishes is *to die like a*
brute. The future judgment is not re-
veal'd with a view to *alarm* and *confound*
the mind, but to restrain those irregular
practices, which are the surest ground
of melancholy suspicions, and inward
horror.

LET men, therefore, but abandon their
vices, their impiety and injustice, re-
venge and cruelty, sensuality and intem-
perance, and endeavour to resemble God
in

SERM. in purity, righteousness, and beneficence,

I.  and then they may always think of him with pleasure, as the compassionate father, the righteous and merciful governor of mankind, who delights in the happiness of his children and subjects: Nay, they may even expect, with joy, the time when they shall appear before his impartial tribunal, when justice will be temper'd with clemency, and all reasonable allowances made both for particular circumstances, and for the general weakness and frailty of human nature; and when *the judge of all the earth*, who must of necessity *do right*, shall render *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good.* --- God grant that we may all have confidence, and not be *asham'd before him at his coming.*

Rom. ii.
8, 9, 10.



S E R M O N II.

The characters of the righteous and good man compared ; or benevolence the noblest improvement of social virtue.

R O M. v. 7.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die.



I N the verse preceding the text ^{SERM.} II. the apostle mentions that great instance of the love of God, in sending his Son into the world to die for us, which is the peculiar discovery of the gospel, and deserves

SERM. serves our highest admiration and grati-

II. *tude; for when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. The goodness of God, in this wonderful constitution, is celebrated, in the New Testament, with the most lofty encomiums. There is an uncommon stress and emphasis laid upon it; God so lov'd the world, &c. and herein is love, that he gave his son to be the propitiation of our sins. It vastly surpasses the most noble and heroic instances of human benevolence and friendship. For, amongst men, there is scarce one to be met with, that will die for a person who is strictly just and righteous; and 'tis very rare and extraordinary to find any that will lay down their lives even for a charitable beneficent man; Peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. This is the immediate connection of the words, which I shall consider, in what follows, as an independent proposition: And grounding my discourse entirely on the observation St. Paul has made, that man-*
kind

John iii.
16.

John iv.
10.

kind have a much greater esteem of kind SERM.
and generous than of merely just actions, II.
shall endeavour to shew, that this is not
owing to *education, fancy and enthusiasm*,
but founded on *right reason*, and a true
judgment of the intrinsic nature and dif-
ferences of things. In order to this, I shall,

- I. Give a short sketch of the charac-
ters of the *righteous* and *good* man.
- II. Shew the vastly superior excellency
of the latter. And,
- III. Make some useful observations on
the whole.

1st. I AM to give a short sketch of the
characters of the *righteous* and *good* man.
There is a general view in which righ-
teousness and goodness have exactly the
same signification, and denote the prac-
tice of every thing that is essentially right
and good. And as, in this large and
extensive sense, they both comprehend all
moral virtues; goodness, or benevolence,
must be included in righteousness, as
justice is included in goodness even in its
most restrain'd sense. But, besides this,
9 the

SERM. the words have a more limited meaning.

II. In the Scriptures, and in all other writings, righteousness frequently signifies the particular virtue of justice; and it would be easy to shew likewise, that goodness, in very many passages of the New Testament, is the same with kindness, generosity, and charity. I shall mention but two, which are indisputable; *Is thine eye evil because I am good?* and again, *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* And there can be no doubt whether we must understand St. Paul thus, when he speaks, in the text, of the *righteous* and *good* man, because they are distinguish'd from each other.

Matt. xx.
15.
Rom. 12.
21.

BUT it may be asked, can a man, in any sense, be strictly just that is not good? — Are not his good offices *due* to his fellow-creatures? I answer, that those who are in distress have, unquestionably, a *right* to be reliev'd, founded on reason, on common ties of humanity, and the mutual dependence of mankind upon one another. This right, however, is only *general*. It does not, in most cases, give them a claim to assistance and support from any particular persons;

persons ; but men are at liberty to chuse the objects towards whom to exercise their charity, as their own judgment and prudence directs, and he that is neglected may have no reason to complain of a real injury done him. Whereas justice is an *immediate* demand that one man has upon another. 'Tis a demand of something *fix'd* and *certain*, which is not the case in acts of charity, the fitness of which, with respect to particular persons, and consequently our claims from them, depend on a variety of circumstances that can't always be adjusted, and very often, perhaps, are not proper to be known. So that tho' he who has it in his power to do many services for his fellow-creatures, which his circumstances and station in life plainly direct to, but neglects to perform them, either thro' indolence, or an hard unrelenting insensible temper ; tho' such a one, I say, may in a more general sense be said to be *unjust*, because he does not that good which the necessities of others call for, and which may fairly be expected from him ; yet it appears, from what has been said, that

SERM. there is some ground for the distinction
 II. made, in the text, between the *righteous*
 and *good* man, and we shall be able the
 more easily to delineate their respective
 characters.

THE *just* man, then, punctually answers all the particular demands that can be made upon him, and renders unto every man what he can exactly and precisely prove to be his due; not upon a *general* right of claim in which others are equally concern'd, but due *immediately* from himself. He is fair and honest in his dealings, true to his promises, nor does any man a direct injury. He will neither defame and blacken his reputation, nor oppress him by open violence, nor circumvent and deceive him by secret fraud. He will not abuse the confidence that is reposed in him, nor take advantage of his neighbour's ignorance to do him a prejudice. And as he is careful to do to others every thing that, in *strict equity*, he is obliged to do, he *rigorously* insists on his due from them; and if he can't be charg'd with *down-right injustice*, imagines that this is all that
 can

can be expected from him, and concerns SERM. himself about nothing farther. I have II. stated the matter thus, because if I should suppose him to recede from his strict right, and make favourable abatements and allowances, it would confound his character with that of the beneficent or generous man, from which, the apostle's argument, in the text, requires it should be kept entirely distinct.

BUT now the *good man* goes far beyond this. He makes the interest of mankind, in a manner, his own, and has a tender and affectionate concern for their welfare. He can't think himself happy, whatever his possessions and enjoyments are, while he sees others miserable. His wealth and affluence delight him chiefly as the poor and indigent are the better for it; and the greatest charm of prosperity is the opportunity it affords of relieving his fellow creatures, and being more extensively useful. He thinks he has discharg'd but *the least part* of his duty, when he has done strict justice to all; and therefore the communicating advice and comfort, assistance and support, according to the va-

SERM. rious exigencies of those with whom he

II. converses, is his constant endeavour, and
 most pleasing entertainment. In the

Job xxix.
 12, 13, 15.

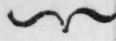
eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, he delivereth the poor that cry, and the fatherless, and him that hath none to help him; the blessing of him that is ready to perish cometh upon him, and he causeth the widows heart to sing for joy. And that he may practise the more large and generous charity, he retrenches useless pomp and extravagance, and by a regular and prudent management, constantly provides for the relief of the necessitous; esteeming this a much more sublime and noble gratification, than the idle amusements and gallantries of a vain and luxurious age. A good man, saith the Psalmist,
 Pf. cxii. 5 *sheweth favour and lendeth; he will guide his affairs with discretion.*

AGAIN, he not only takes all occasions, that present themselves, of doing good, but seeks for opportunities to be useful; 'tis part of the stated employment and business of his life. He contrives and studies which way he may be most serviceable

viceable to his fellow-creatures, and what SERM.
 that particular talent is, with which he is 11.
 entrusted for the good of mankind. If it
 be *power*, he protects and encourages vir-
 tue by his authority and influence, is
 the patron of liberty, and vindicates
 the cause of oppress'd innocence: if
riches, he is *rich in good works, ready to* 1 Tim. vi.
distribute, willing to communicate: if 18.
knowledge, he counts it his highest plea-
 sure to instruct the ignorant, and admini-
 ster proper direction and comfort in per-
 plexing and difficult circumstances, and
 to defend the cause of religion, and repre-
 sent it in a just and amiable light. And
 to nothing of this does he want to be *sol-*
licitated, but his generous heart is always
 ready, and strongly disposed for beneficent
 designs and actions. You can't lay a
 greater obligation upon him than by pro-
 posing ways in which he may be useful,
 or enlarge his sphere of usefulness: For
 this is the point in which all his views, all
 his desires, all his satisfaction, center.

ADD to this, that he is inclined to a-
 bate of his right, when insisting too

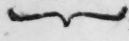
SERM. strictly upon it may have the appear-

II.  an-
 ance of harshness and severity; and has
 such a strong sense of benevolence, such
 an exalted spirit of humanity and com-
 passion, that no considerations of *private*
interest, no difference of *nation* or *religious*
profession can restrain; and which the
greatest injuries cannot bear down and
 extinguish. He aims that his goodness
 may be as *diffusive* as possible, and as
 much like that of the universal parent,
 the supreme and eternal fountain of
 good, who supports, enlivens, and recre-
 ates the whole creation; and therefore, as
 he is generous in all his designs, he is
 very fearful of disobliging any either by
 word, or action, and endeavours, in the
 whole of his conduct, to be agreeable as
 well as useful to all; being candid in
 his censures, practising to his inferiors the
 most endearing condescension, and care-
 fully avoiding moroseness, and every
 thing that has the appearance of inso-
 lence and contempt. Finally, that I may
 conclude the sketch, which I design'd, of
 the most beautiful and honourable cha-
 racter, the *good* man is unwearied in his
 endeavours

endeavours to promote the happiness of SERM. others ; the ardour of his benevolence is II. not cool'd tho' he meets with ungrateful returns ; the trouble and expence of the service don't discourage him ; nay, he is ready to give up all private considerations for the sake of the public welfare, and even to sacrifice *life itself*, when the good of the world requires it. This shall suffice for the first head : I proceed now

To shew, SECONDLY, the superior excellency of the *good* man's character to that of the *merely righteous*, or just man. An attempt of this kind must, I am persuaded, be thought almost needless, after what has been already said. For the placing the two characters, truly drawn, in the same point of view, that they may be fairly consider'd and compared together, will so strongly illustrate the beauty of the beneficent character, that the other will be look'd upon as a foil to set it off to the greater advantage, and perhaps not to be regarded and valued as it ought. And as the mind of man is so framed, as immediately to prefer gene-

SERM. ROUS beneficence to strict and rigid ju-

II.  stice, there is the more difficulty in enlarging here ; because there is scarce a medium of proof to be found, that is clearer than the thing itself at first sight. The truth appears at once, upon comparing our ideas ; and in all cases which are so plain, and, in a manner, self-evident, 'tis sufficient to appeal to the reason and common sense of mankind ; and very difficult to argue in such a way, as not to perplex and darken the subject. However, I shall suggest a few things, in which the difference of the characters mentioned in the text will be readily acknowledged. And

1st. THE character of the *good* man is much more *amiable* in itself. Justice indeed, so far as it goes, is not only an irreproveable character, but rational and becoming ; but no man will say that it has any thing *great* and *generous* in it, because 'tis, indeed, the least degree of virtue that can be suppos'd in social life.

—'Tis approv'd of, but not admir'd—

We don't think ourselves oblig'd to the person that does it, since 'tis, really, as
little

little as he can do for us; justice being SERM.
 what all have an undoubted right to II.
 claim——And therefore there is properly
 no *merit* in it, nothing that exalts and
dignifies a character, because 'tis expected
 from all who have any notion of good
 and evil, and are not quite lost to vir-
 tue.

BUT benevolence, *disinterested*, *generous*,
diffusive benevolence, is the highest perfec-
 tion and glory of human nature. It ar-
 gues true greatness of mind, and is a vir-
 tue that men of mean and narrow spirits
 cannot practise.——'Tis not only a right,
 but a *beautiful* character, that charms the
 beholders, and attracts universal esteem
 and love.——Even the most dissolute and
 profligate can't help being struck with it
 in others, however they may neglect to
 excel in it themselves.——And the finest
 and most shining qualities, the most ex-
 cellent endowments of nature, and high-
 est improvements of art, are *low* and *de-*
spicable in comparison of it, and derive all
 their *lustre* from it. Without it, riches
 are *insolent* and *arbitrary*; power is *op-*
pressive and *tyrannical*; and wisdom mis-
 chievous

SERM. chievous *craft* and *subtilty*, or, at best,

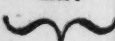
II. *vain and useless ostentation*.——I appeal to
 the reason of mankind, whether if any one was to form the most lovely and amiable, and at the same time the greatest and most heroic character he could possibly devise, it would not be that of the *generous and faithful friend*, the *liberal compassionate benefactor*, the *disinterested and noble-minded patriot*, who diffuses relief, comfort, and happiness all around him; is enlarg'd beyond mean and selfish views; and considers himself, as a member of the grand community of mankind, born for the general good.

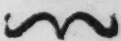
AGAIN, the superior excellence of *goodness* to *justice* is evident from hence, that the latter is necessarily included in the former, as the less in the greater; but without benevolence, justice, instead of being a finished, is a very *defective* character; nay it forms, upon the whole, a bad character, a *little, narrow, selfish* character, that is justly the object of contempt. This will be more fully illustrated by applying it to the supreme being, whom if we suppose to be only
 4 just,

just, and not absolutely and universally SERM.
benevolent and merciful, we entirely de- II.
stroy the foundation of those exalted, ho-
nourable, and lovely conceptions of him,
which wise and thinking men, in all ages,
have entertain'd. But his goodness, his
unlimited goodness, which is so gloriously
display'd in the frame of our own nature,
in the whole constitution of things, and
the whole course of providence, renders
him the worthy object of our trust and
confidence, and of our supreme love and
delight.

2dly. As the *good* man's character is
much more lovely in itself, so it is more
useful than that of the *merely righteous*
or just man. By justice mens properties
are, indeed, in a good measure secur'd,
and injury and violence, and consequent-
ly much confusion and mischief in the
world, is prevented; but the greatest
part of the true enjoyments of life, of
the conveniencies and comforts of it, a-
rise from *benevolence*. Without justice,
societies could not subsist; but without
benevolence, if they might possibly sub-
sist (which can hardly be imagin'd) they
would

SERM. would infallibly be miserable. Mankind

II.  are form'd for society, and, by means of their large and extensive capacities, may be exceedingly useful to each other ; but if one were to do for another no more than he could *strictly claim*, very little good would actually be done, and thus the design of their social nature must be defeated, and the present being extremely uncomfortable. For of the man that is only just, the utmost that can, generally, be said is, that he is not a mischievous creature ; but he may be *insignificant*, a kind of *blank* in the creation : He does no wrong or injury to any ; but then he contributes very little to the positive happiness of the world. No : 'tis *generous friendship*, the *tender sympathizing temper*, the *open and liberal heart* that make pleasure circulate, and alleviate the cares of life. And did men, universally, study how to be useful, and practise beneficence in its greatest latitude ; were their interests consider'd as dependent upon, and inseparably connected with, each other, and a constant inter-

intercourse of good offices maintain'd a-S E R M.
 mong all who are united in the com- II.
 mon bonds of humanity; the face of 
 things would be alter'd unspeakably for
 the better, and the world be as happy,
 as the imperfection and frailty, and many
 unavoidable casualties of the present state
 will admit of. But mere justice can't in-
 troduce any thing like this desirable and
 delightful scene; and, consequently, is
 vastly inferiour, in respect of real advan-
 tage to mankind, to the exercise of be-
 nevolence, to which, *partial* and *limited*
 as it is, the far greatest part of the hap-
 piness that is in the world is undeniably
 owing.

3dly. THE *good* man's character is not
 only more useful than that of the *just*
 man, but its influence is abundantly
 more *extensive*. In matters in which *ac-*
tive justice is concern'd, men are, gene-
 rally, confin'd to a narrow circle. With
 regard to those, with whom they have
 no dealings or commerce, their *justice* a-
 mounts to no more *in most cases*, than
 not being *unjust*.

BUT

SERM. BUT persons of whom we *know nothing*,

II. and with whom we never had *any communication*; persons who are at the *greatest distance* from us; and whom, whether we consider their numbers, the different places of their abode, or the variety of their circumstances, the most remote consequences of our *justice* or *injustice* can't be suppos'd to reach; may feel the kind effects of our generosity and compassion. And as its influence is so much wider, and, at the same time, the benefits that accrue to the world by it beyond comparison greater, than can result from the mere exercise of justice, this is a convincing and unanswerable demonstration of its superior excellence. And considering the *vast usefulness* of this virtue, together with its *intrinsic beauty*, 'tis no wonder that it engages the admiration, the affection, and gratitude of mankind to such a degree, that *for a good man some would even dare to die*. There is another thing,

4thly. WHICH I know not whether it be any ground of the apostle's observation

tion in the text, but yet it deserves to be SERM.
taken notice of, as it evidently shews the II.
superior excellence of *goodness* to *strict*
justice; and that is, that when a man is
just, but not benevolent, he can't be sup-
pos'd to act from a *right principle*.—

Not in obedience to *the authority of God*,
which would determine *universally*; and
not suffer him to neglect one of the most
important laws which God hath given to
mankind, while he pretends a zeal for
another that is of inferior consequence.—

Nor from a regard to *the fitness of the*
thing itself, because that, likewise, would in-
fluence, in a stronger manner, to the ex-
ercise of benevolence, which is a much
more *exalted* virtue.

'Tis therefore a
reasonable presumption, that he is just
only from selfish views; at least, he can
have but very lame and confused no-
tions of religion and morality, and must
proceed upon mean and narrow prin-
ciples. Whereas, on the contrary, the
good man, in the utmost extent of that
character, can't but have the *noblest* views,
and an uncommon *generosity* and *great-*
ness of soul. He imitates the father of
the

SERM. the universe, acts from the same sublime

II. motives, and in pursuance of the same most excellent and worthy end. But I can't enlarge on these things, tho' they are of the utmost importance, and the strongest possible recommendation of the good and beneficent character.

GIVE me leave, however, to make one observation more before I conclude this head, tho' it be of a different kind from the foregoing, and that is, that there is an argument for charity and generous beneficence, suggested in the text, from *private interest*; as it tends to procure universal love and esteem, and powerfully engages our fellow creatures to do good offices for us in circumstances where they are most needed, and even with *inconvenience* and *damage* to themselves. Disinterested kindness and compassion have a natural tendency to soften the *hardest* hearts, and win upon the most *barbarous* and *savage* tempers. The most *vitious* can't think of offering any insult to it without the utmost reluctance; but, where there is *a sense of virtue*, there will be the highest esteem of it. And tho' perhaps, there

there are very few, who, if matters were driven to that extremity, would really lay down their lives for the most obliging and useful man, yet he would have many friends who would ardently desire his welfare, compassionate and relieve him in his distresses, and chearfully contribute to his happiness. So that *generous benevolence* to mankind is more for our interest, in the present world, than a *churlish, sullen* behaviour; and much more than *malice, cruelty, and revenge*, which render a person despised, or hated, by all. Such an one will, in all probability, be served with regret, be *envied* in his prosperity, and *insulted* in his misery. I shall now conclude with these two reflections.

1st. WE may infer, from what has been said in this discourse, the great wisdom and goodness of God in the frame of human nature; which is so formed, as strongly to approve of kind beneficent actions, even when it has no *particular interest* in them; and has an *immediate abhorrence* of malice and cruelty. Benevolence (as has been shewn) is the chief dignity and glory of mankind, and that virtue

SERM. on which all the advantages and happiness
II. of social life, in a great measure, depend.

— The all-wise creator, therefore, hath graciously provided for it in our very make and constitution; and not only endued us with reason, whereby we are capable of contriving and consulting for the good of others, but planted in us such strong *instincts* and *natural propensions* to kindness and compassion, as can't be over-rul'd and extinguish'd without losing humanity itself; and, by this means, he hath counterballanc'd the principle of *self-love*, which, were it not for our benevolent affections, would engage us in narrow schemes, and little mean pursuits, inconsistent with the welfare of society, and the general happiness of our fellow-creatures.

2dly. WE learn the excellency of the *Christian Religion*, which has carried the noble principle of benevolence to its highest pitch, and improv'd it to the utmost perfection it is capable of. The whole strain of Christianity is love, harmony, and peace, condescension and mutual forbearance, tender mercy and compassion. The charity which it recommends, *suffereth*

long

long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.—Nay we are commanded to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; —and even to lay down our lives for the brethren; walking in love, as Christ also bath loved us, and bath given himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.—And on this command our Saviour lays a particular stress, and makes it the very characteristic of a Christian.

OUR holy religion inculcates farther, not only the most *disinterested* and *generous*, but the most *extensive* benevolence; love to ALL MANKIND, notwithstanding difference of nation, religion, interest, love for even our enemies, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.—It gives us frequent assurances, that this virtue is, in a particular manner, pleasing to God, and will entitle us to a most glorious reward.—

SERM.

II.

1 Cor. iv.

5. 6. 7.

1 Tim. vi.

18.

1 John iii.

16.

Eph. v. 2.

Luke iv.

55.

Chap. x.

24. &c.

Gal. vi.

10.

1 Pet. iii.

9.

Mat. xxv.

34. &c.

2 Cor. ix.

6. 7.

SERM. It sets before us an example of it, in our

II. own nature, in the character of *the author and finisher of our faith, who went*

Acts x.
38.

about doing good; and requires, that we look not only on our own things, but every man also on the things of others; and that the same mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus; who, tho' he was in the form of God,—made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and, to accomplish our sal-

Phil. ii. 4,
Ec.

vation, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. — Nay, it pro-

Luke vi.
36.

poses to our imitation, the example of the supreme creator and father of mankind, whose goodness is unlimited and universal; especially in giving his son to die for us, even *whilst we were enemies*; for if

1 John iv.
10, 11

God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

FROM this short view of the Christian doctrine 'tis plain, that it lays down the most exalted scheme of benevolence, supported and enforced by the strongest motives. And, indeed, it has ever been reckon'd one of the chief intrinsic excellencies of

of Christianity, that the goodness it recom- SERM.
mends is so *pure* and *disinterested*, and aims, II.
as much as possible, at promoting the *ge-
neral happiness*. But yet, upon this very
account, has it been reflected on, as if it
had pass'd by, or lost in a *general, loose*
and *undetermin'd* charity, two of the most
sublime and noble instances of benevo-
lence, *private friendship*, and *the love of*
our country. I intend, therefore, to take
this for the subject of my next discourse,
wherein I shall endeavour to shew (besides
the unanswerable reasons that there were,
from the circumstances of the world at
that time, why these things should not be
particularly inculcated) that both private
friendship, and the love of our country,
so far as they have any thing truly ratio-
nal and excellent in them, are included
in, and must be entirely subservient to,
the great law of *universal benevolence*,
which is an infinitely more important and
generous principle; that particular friend-
ships may be extremely *base* and *mischie-*
vous, and the love of our country sup-
porting a faction against the *common rights*
of mankind; but that, on the contrary, to

SERM. be steady and inflexible in our endeavours
II. to promote the *universal good*, tho' we
are oblig'd, in order to it, to sacrifice
private friends, nay the interests of any
single society, how great and flourishing
soever, is *manly, noble, godlike*.





S E R M O N III.

The perfection of the Christian scheme of benevolence; in answer to the objection from its not having particularly recommended private friendship, and the love of our country.

ROM. v. 7.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die.



HAVING, in my last discourse, SERM.
shewn the excellence of bene- III.
volence, that 'tis vastly superior to justice, and the noblest virtue in social life; and having

SERM. prov'd the peculiar excellency of the

III. *Christian scheme* of benevolence, not only as 'tis most disinterested and generous, but of universal extent and influence; not to be confin'd by any difference of nation, religion, interest, nor suppress'd and extinguish'd by personal injuries: I proceed now to answer an objection that has been rais'd against it, by a late *noble*, and justly *celebrated* writer, from its not particularly inculcating *private friendship*, and the *love of our country*. 'Tis thought very strange, that these, which are rank'd among the most *heroic* virtues, should be *purely voluntary in a Christian*, and *no essential parts of his charity* *. In order, therefore, to set this matter in a just light, I shall,

- I. Settle the notion of private friendship, and the love of our country, and shew how far they are truly virtuous and honourable. And then,
- II. Offer a few things more directly, to vindicate the Christian benevolence against the force of this objection.

* CHARACTERISTICKS, Vol. I. p. 99.

I. I AM to settle the true notion of SERM.
private friendship, and the love of our III.
country, and shew how far they are truly
virtuous and honourable. 'Tis undeni-
able, that both these principles have been
grossly abused. Private friendships have
been only little parties in vice and mis-
chief, and public disorder; and an attach-
ment to the interests of particular societies
has been a vile conspiracy against justice,
honour, liberty, and the peace and hap-
piness of the world. 'Tis necessary there-
fore that we settle their proper bounds,
that none may be led away, by the mere
force of agreeable and bewitching sounds,
so as to pervert what, if rightly under-
stood, are really *amiable* and *useful*, into
monstrous, unnatural and *hurtful* qualities.

UNIVERSAL benevolence, then, is the
supreme law to all rational beings; a law
of eternal and immutable obligation, the
authority of which ought not to be su-
perseded, limited, or, in the least, weak-
ned by any selfish or partial affections.
For if there be any beauty and amiable-
ness,

SERM. ness, at all, in doing good, the more ex-

III. tended our views are, it must be so much
 { the more meritorious and honourable;
 and, consequently, to aim at the univer-
 sal good must be the highest degree of
 virtue. ——— Nothing forms so great and
 worthy a character. ——— 'Tis indeed the
 chief part even of God's moral recti-
 tude ; ——— and must, therefore, be the su-
 preme dignity and perfection of human
 nature. Again, the happiness of the whole
 species cannot be *too intensely* pursued ;
 whereas all other affections are no longer
innocent, than while they are, at least,
 consistent with this ; are only *virtuous*, so
 far as they directly promote it ; but are
base and *detestable*, when they interfere
 with it.

To apply this to the case of *private
 friendship*. When my love of a friend
 is inconsistent with the regards I owe my
 country ; and especially when it opposes
 the general good of mankind, to whom
 all my services are more immediately and
 strictly due ; 'tis an *unnatural* affection,
 and ought to be rooted out of the mind ;
 because, were it universally indulg'd, it
 would

Christian scheme of benevolence.

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would introduce the utmost confusion, and an entire subversion of all order and government. No man can support his friend by interrupting the course of *justice*, or violating the rules of *honour*, who is not an utter stranger to virtue ; but, on the contrary, must it be a *noble* action, agreeable to *reason*, *humanity*, and every *benevolent* and *social* principle, to desert him for the public good. And this being the great rule by which we are to determine, in all cases, concerning the expediency and fitness of private friendships ; it follows farther, that they have nothing truly generous in them, but as they tend to cultivate and improve *universal benevolence* ; and are a natural means to make the *whole species* happy.

For if they are not chosen for this reason because they are best upon the whole, if they are only not contrary to the public happiness, but have no direct influence to promote it, our views must be mean and selfish ; and friendship will become a mere matter of *private convenience*, or else of *humour* and *fancy* ;

SERM.

III.

in either of which cases it must be uncertain and variable, as circumstances, opinions, and interests alter; or, finally, it will be only *the love of ourselves*, i. e. of the resemblance of our own way of thinking, dispositions, and manners, in others; and, consequently, nothing like that sublime and heroic virtue for which it has been recommended, and which, indeed, it is in itself, so long as 'tis *the medium of universal benevolence*.

AGAIN, all friendship, in order to its being truly rational and praise-worthy, must be founded in *virtue*. For this is the only ground of that esteem and steady confidence, which are inseparable from a worthy and generous friendship. 'Tis in this way alone that it can be at all useful, or, in any measure, promote the end of every lesser alliance, *viz.* the welfare of the great community of mankind. 'Tis this that distinguishes true friendship from the vile cabals of robbers and traitors, men of dark and mischievous designs, who may have all the other characters of it, such as a similitude of " tempers, passions, interests, secrecy, confidence,

“ fidence, constancy, nay, a reciprocal SERM.
“ tenderness and affection for each other.” III.

And from hence it follows, that the love of a friend must be proportioned to his real merit, otherwise 'tis foolish and unreasonable *partiality*; and that we ought to prefer every man before him, that has, really, a more excellent and useful character. In our *esteem* we must necessarily do it, unless our private affection has blinded and perverted our judgments; and there are some cases supposable, in which, if we would not forfeit the glorious title of being the *friends of mankind* for a little fantastic name of friendship, we must do it in our *services* too. Suffer me to give an instance, in which this is indisputable. Suppose there is an office in the state to be disposed of, of vast consequence to the common welfare, that requires, to the right discharge of it, very great and distinguish'd abilities, and that the competition for it lies, entirely, between my most intimate friend, and another with whom I never cultivated any familiar acquaintance, but have only a general knowledge of; if my friend

SERM. friend be unskilful and indolent, and I

III.

have reason to believe, from a thorough experience of his temper, that he will behave ill in it, to the detriment of the public ; and the other has a much better judgment, more generosity, steadiness, command of his passions, and is qualified, upon all accounts, for greater usefulness ;——Can I be long in suspense which to determine for ?—Shall I compliment my *friend* at the expence of my *country* ? Such friendships as these are so far from being instances of virtue, that they would be justly branded with infamy : And whoever acted thus could have no real benevolence in him, which can never prefer a less good to a greater ; nor, consequently, the advantage and pleasure of *an individual*, or the gratifying his selfishness and vanity, to the *general* happiness.

I MAY add, that there is something, in almost all accounts of private friendship, that is in a great measure *mechanical*. A high esteem of a wise, virtuous, and useful character, an ardent zeal to serve our friends, and faithfulness to their interests,

is what all may attain to ; but the fervour and strength of passion that sometimes mixes with it, what we may call the *enthusiasm* of friendship, depends very much upon a particular constitution.——

'Tis the more gross part.——And though it be highly extolled, and is apt to strike in the relation, and beget the strongest prejudices in favour of friendship, it is rather by engaging our *affections*, than convincing our *judgment*.——What is most valuable in it is the deliberate and rational part, which is founded on principles of generous and universal benevolence.

AND as there is a great deal *mechanical*, there are other things very highly celebrated, which, if they are prescrib'd as general rules and laws of friendship, are *wild* and *romantic*. For instance, it is magnified as a most noble and heroic action for a man to sacrifice all private interest, and even life itself, for his friend. I shall not dispute the disinterestedness and generosity of it, nor that it may, in some cases, be, upon the whole, very commendable ; but there are others, in which
it

SERM. it will be easy to shew, that it may not

III. only be *rash* and *imprudent* in him, but inconsistent with *prior* and more *important*

obligations. — The circumstances of his *family*, and others whose happiness nearly depend upon him — his importance to the *society of which he is a member* — and usefulness to *the world in general* — ought all to be consider'd ; and may be very strong arguments to prevail with him to preserve himself. And if for the sake of a friend, who, tho' possess'd of several amiable qualities, may be of little consequence in active and social life, he deprives his children of a kind protector and guide, and the state of a wise experienc'd counsellor, the chief assertor and guardian of its liberties ; and consequently over-rules the strongest impulses of *natural affection*, and the regard he owes his *country*, and *mankind* ; his friendship is evidently founded on the ruins of *reason* and *humanity*. Let us therefore separate the *mechanical* part, and all *extravagant transports*, from private friendship, and consider it as a thing that reason may approve and justify ; and we shall find, that 'tis
nothing

nothing more than the *reciprocal esteem* SERM.
and *affection* of virtuous minds, united by III.
a harmony of inclinations, views, and
interest, all *upright* and *generous* ———

That it never exceeds, in any instance,
the rules of *justice*, *truth*, and *honour*;—
is always subservient to the great law of
universal benevolence; ———and valuable,
not as 'tis an attachment to private per-
sons, but as a means of promoting the
cause of virtue, and the happiness of the
world.

The same may be said of *the love of our
country*, viz. that 'tis a rational and vir-
tuous disposition, not merely as 'tis a re-
gard for a *particular part* of the species,
but as it has a tendency to advance the
universal good. To love our country on-
ly because we *were born in it*, without
carrying our views to any thing farther,
is weak and childish; the prejudice of
education and *custom*: This is making
mere chance the ground and rule of our
affection, and not the dictates of reason
and virtue: Or are we strongly attach'd
to the inhabitants of a particular spot
only upon this account, our being engag'd

SERM. to defend and support each other?—This
 III. is debasing a very noble principle, and
 making it *mean* and *selfish*. In order,
 therefore, to raise it to so great and heroic a virtue as it has been represented, we must seek out some other foundation for it. Now the true state of the matter I take to be this:

FOR their security against injury and violence, and to answer, in the most effectual manner, the great end of their benevolent and generous affections, mankind found it necessary to form *particular societies*: The reason of supporting these voluntary combinations is not only *self-defence*, but because such a method is for the *general good*: These two ideas ought never to be separated, because things can't continue in a regular and natural state, but while the good of every part is consider'd as subordinate to the good of the whole: Now the good of the whole is unquestionably best promoted, by every person's having a hearty affection for the society to which he belongs, and a strong zeal for its welfare: This is his immediate concern; — the station and sphere
 of

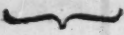
Christian scheme of benevolence.

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of usefulness that providence has assign'd SERM.
him.—And to be indifferent about his III.
country, nay, indeed, not to cultivate an
ardent love of it; but, instead of this,
to amuse himself with forming idle
schemes for the benefit of *foreign* nations,
to whom he is no way related, nor, per-
haps, likely to be known, nor, conse-
quently, to have so much influence among
them, as to be able to reduce his schemes,
were they ever so beneficial, to practice;
is very preposterous and extravagant: 'Tis,
in effect, resolving to be useless, and ne-
glect the good of mankind altogether.

Since, therefore, a love of the *public*,
i. e. of the particular civil community of
which we are members, and a generous
defence of its laws and liberties, is the
only way that men, in general, have,
to contribute their share to the happi-
ness of the species, and, if universally cul-
tivated, a natural means of effecting this
noble and most desirable end; we must
resolve the merit of it chiefly into this,
and enlarge it beyond *narrow, contracted*
views, if we would make it a sublime and
heroic virtue: The undeniable conse-

SERM. quence of which is, that 'tis only a rational principle, when 'tis entirely consistent with, and subservient to the supreme law of universal benevolence. —

III.  It ought never to propose a *distinct interest* from that of the whole; for then it immediately ceases to be an amiable and useful quality, and becomes one of the most vile and mischievous: For instance, when it prompts any to extend their territories by unjust conquests, to oppress and plunder weaker states, and spread slavery and destruction thro' the world; in all such cases, when a particular country is a *wicked faction* against the rights of all mankind, which, it would be for the general good, to have suppress'd and extirpated, no one who has any sense of generosity can rejoice in its success: Love of our country is then a *private* affection, and must give way to the *public* one: And tho' we may be so far concern'd for its prosperity, as to lament the degeneracy and violence that prevails in it, and even to hazard our lives to remedy its disorders; we can't surely wish well to it any other way, while 'tis carrying on
such

such mischievous schemes; we can't re-
joice in its victories, without declaring
ourselves enemies to justice, liberty, and
the universal happiness, and, consequently,
being monsters of iniquity and cruelty.

SERM.

III.

It appears upon the whole, that both
private friendship, and the love of our
country, are only so far amiable and gene-
rous, as they are branches of universal
benevolence. Nothing can be a virtuous,
a great or noble, but what is also a *use-*
ful quality; and 'tis an infallibly right
rule of judging in all cases of benevo-
lence, which may seem to clash and in-
terfere with each other, to aim at the
greatest and *most extensive* good: So that
if there be a real necessity, I am to sacri-
fice my friend for the sake of my coun-
try, and my country for the general hap-
piness of mankind. Universal benevo-
lence, therefore, is infinitely the most ex-
alted and heroic spring of action; because
the universal good can't be pursued to an
excess, but private friendship and the
love of our country may be so preverted,
as to become mischievous and destructive
principles: The former is entirely *dis-*

SER M. *interested*, and can proceed only from the
 III. love of goodness, and, consequently, is a
 most *godlike* disposition; the latter may
 both spring from *little, selfish* motives, and
 terminate in a *narrow private* interest:
 The former contains every instance of re-
 strain'd and partial affection, that has any
 thing great and lovely in it, and is there-
 fore the *whole sum* of social virtue; where-
 as the latter, without more enlarg'd views
 than the mere pleasure of a friend, or the
 welfare of our country, forms a charac-
 ter so far from being eminently good,
 that it wants *the very essentials* of true
 goodness. And this alone is sufficient
 to vindicate our Saviour's scheme of bene-
 volence, and give us a high idea of its
excellency and perfection. I proceed, how-
 ever, in the

SECOND place, to offer a few things,
 more directly, in answer to the objec-
 tion that has been made against it, from
 its not recommending, particularly, pri-
 vate friendship, and the love of our coun-
 try. And,

1st. THERE is one circumstance, which
 has been already hinted, that will go a
 great

Christian scheme of benevolence.

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great way, of itself, to remove this seeming difficulty, viz. that the Christian principle of universal benevolence includes both these, so far as they are founded in *reason*, and have any thing *virtuous* and *praiseworthy* in them: *Universal* benevolence must, in the very nature of the thing, comprehend every species of *real* benevolence; and a command to promote the general good, necessarily implies all the proper means of doing it; and, consequently, every instance of private friendship, and zeal for the interests of particular communities, that appears to have this natural tendency.

'Tis no just objection against moral discourses, that they lay down, chiefly, general rules for the right conduct of life: for these alone are *eternal* and *unchangeable* morality: and the true application of them to particular cases must be left to every man's own reason, because it depends on a variety of circumstances, that alter the expediency of things. To apply this to the point before us; the great law of benevolence is to aim at the happiness of the whole spe-

SERM.

III.

SERM. cies: This is a proper rule for all mankind, and obliges persons of every complexion and character; but the manner in which it may be done is, to different men, very different, and, consequently, must be referr'd, in a great measure, to their own judgment and discretion: Nor is this likely to create any confusion, because general principles are easily accommodated to particular circumstances, where there is an honest mind, and the least degree of reflection: For every one that thinks must immediately see, that nothing can be an act of real benevolence which opposes the universal good; and will soon discern in what cases, private friendship and the love of our country are a fit means to advance it.

LET me observe farther, tho' the *noble* author, whom we are considering, seems to think it a *strange* supposition, that private friendship is not a matter of *strict* and *indispensible* duty upon all, but, for the most part, a *purely voluntary* engagement. General benevolence is a fix'd, immutable, and universal duty. An esteem of good and virtuous characters is
always

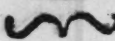
Christian scheme of benevolence. 67

always rational, because 'tis necessarily S E R M.
connected with the love of virtue itself: III.

But this is not the notion of friendship; which is a "*peculiar relation*, form'd by " a consent and harmony of minds*," as well as founded in virtue; from whence 'tis an undeniable consequence, that it can't be every man's duty, since it evidently depends on circumstances that are quite out of our power. There are innumerable instances, in which persons may find several among their acquaintance, and in the same sphere of life, whom they highly esteem, but not one proper to be chosen for a *close* and *intimate* friend; so that the recommending private friendship, *in the general*, must have been very absurd, since 'tis only a *rare* and *accidental* obligation, and never falls in the way of a great part of mankind. And besides, it might have been attended with mischievous effects; for the bulk of the world, thinking it a duty of religion, and a necessary branch of sublime and heroic virtue, would enter in-

* Characteristics, Vol. i. p. 58. in the marginal note.

SERM. to *rash, unconcerted, and disagreeable alli-*

III.  ances, which must, naturally, produce a great deal of disorder, and disturb the peace of societies: Whereas while they act upon the principle of universal benevolence, no ill consequences can ensue; and, therefore, the inculcating this principle only, as an essential part of morality, and leaving private friendship to fall in as a branch of it, just as prudence, on a view of all circumstances, directs, is the *wisest* and *best* way of instructing mankind. We may add farther,

2dly. To vindicate our Saviour's conduct on this occasion, that there has been very little need, in any age, to put men upon cultivating particular friendships, and the love of their country; but rather to give a check to these narrow limited affections, and correct the exorbitancies of them. Mankind have a *natural* inclination to both, and there is no fear of their neglecting either, so far as 'tis truly generous and useful; on the contrary, the only danger is, that they will be carried to so great a height, as to be prejudicial to the general good. The experience of our
own

Christian scheme of benevolence. 69

own times, and the history of all ages, is an ample justification of the truth of this remark. SERM.
III.

Friendships have always been frequent enough.—But of what kind are they?—do they not spring from *humour* and *caprice*, from a harmony of *odd*, *whimsical*, and *unaccountable* tempers, from *singularity* and *selfishness*?—or are they built upon the solid foundations of *honour* and *virtue*? In like manner, zeal for the interest of a particular country is it not *universal*?—But then is it truly *benevolent* and *public spirited*? Far from it: 'Tis more commonly an absurd and childish prejudice, that makes men so extravagantly fond of themselves, as to treat all other nations with insolence and contempt: 'Tis a zeal that makes an *idol* of our country, and is ready to sacrifice even the good of the whole species to it. There was no reason, then, that our Saviour should particularly inculcate these things, to which mankind have so *natural* a turn, and are so apt to indulge *to excess*: His great work was to rectify all disorders, and, in an especial manner, *the abuse of good principles*, and the extravagancies

SERM. gancies that arise from it; and this he
 III. has effectually done, in the case before
 us, by enforcing the obligations of universal goodness, which will *regulate* all inferior affections without *destroying* them: For the observing this rule will lead to every instance both of friendship, and love of our country, that is really *amiable* and *beneficial*, and discourage such only of either kind as are *unmanly*, and *mischievous*. Let me observe,

3dly. THAT there was a *particular reason*, from the circumstances of the world at that time, why the Christian religion should not directly and strongly recommend the love of our country: In general, 'tis not a thing necessary to be insisted on, because 'tis included in the love of mankind, and what all are powerfully inclin'd to by education, custom, their own particular interest, and the like; but rather expedient that such narrow prejudices should be remov'd, by inculcating more generous and extensive views: And 'twas much less to be expected at a juncture, when an affection for particular countries was a *general nuisance*, and triumph'd

Christian scheme of benevolence.

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umph'd over justice and humanity: For SERM.
'tis well known, that the *Jews* were so III.
partially fond of their own nation, that
they look'd upon themselves as the only
favourites of heaven; which made them
severe and rigid in their censures, and
morose and unsociable to all who were
not of their religion: And, undoubtedly,
the notion that seems, generally, to have
prevail'd among them, that the *Messiah*
was to be their temporal prince, and ex-
tend his dominion over all the earth,
would have put them on subduing and
oppressing other countries, as soon as they
imagin'd they had a favourable opportu-
nity for it: They wanted nothing but
the power to effect this vile and barba-
rous design, which their *selfishness* and *pride*
suggested.—And as for the *Romans*, whose
noble lectures of benevolence and gene-
rosity are so much boasted of, and their
love of their country represented as the
very perfection of heroic virtue; the
Romans, I say, were the *plagues* and
scourges of mankind, and had actually
carried their arms and conquests, and, to-
gether with them, terror, slavery, and
ruin,

SERM. ruin, thro' the greatest part of the then
III. known world.

— Was this now a time to recommend narrow views, and an attachment to particular societies, when the *general interest* had suffered so much by it?—It was rather the way to have destroy'd *public benevolence* altogether: The proper lesson to be inculcated, in such a confus'd and degenerate state of things, was certainly *universal goodness*, in order to put a stop to the progress of ambition, avarice and luxury, which had introduc'd such dreadful desolation, and subverted liberty, justice, and all social virtues: This was the only remedy that could be applied to the prevailing disorder: So that our Saviour's scheme of benevolence is not only, in itself, the *noblest* and most *godlike* that we can conceive of; but in keeping to fundamental and general principles, and not descending to lesser considerations, he acted the part of a *wise reformer*; —a friend to the *universal happiness*; —and an enemy to *oppression* and *tyranny*. Suffer me to add,

In the last place, That tho' the Chris-
tian religion has not particularly enjoin'd
private friendship, and the love of our
country, because, so far as they have any
thing virtuous and commendable in them,
they fall in necessarily with the regular
pursuit of the general good, and because
'twas needless in itself, this being the con-
stant bent of human nature; and finally,
because 'tis always more proper to restrain
the excesses of these principles, than to
allow them scope and latitude, and was
so *particularly* at the time of our Saviour's
appearance; tho', I say, for these very
sufficient and weighty reasons, they are
not directly enjoin'd in the Christian re-
ligion, yet 'tis *a false insinuation*, that it
has given no encouragement to them:
For we have, in the character of Christ
himself, an eminent example of each of
these virtues, which is equally binding, as
an express law, upon all who acknow-
ledge his authority: He chose but twelve
persons to be his immediate and constant
followers, and one of them he made his
friend: Accordingly we read, in the his-
tory of the New Testament, of the *dis-*
ciple

SERM. *iple whom Jesus loved; whom he always*

III. treated with confidence, and particular

Joh. xix.

20.

marks of tenderness and affection.——

Here was a friendship that sprang from *virtue*; from a consent and harmony of the most *benevolent, mild and amiable* dispositions; it was entirely *rational, disinterested, generous and faithful*; subservient to the *universal good*, being founded in the love of goodness itself; and, consequently, a perfect pattern for our imitation.

Luke xix. 41. And was not his weeping over *Jeru-*

salem, from a sense of its impending ruin, a noble proof of his ardent concern for the *public welfare*? were not all his labours to make his people happy, by reforming their corruptions and vices? was it not for this that he suffered so many abuses?——nay, did he not *even die* for the good of his country? I may add to this the example of *St. Paul*, who was so transported by his affection for his countrymen, as to wish that the greatest of evils might befall himself, even to be

Rom. ix. 3.

accurs'd from Christ, if, by that means, he might be the instrument of preserving

serving and establishing their prosperity. SERM.

These are instances, than which, if we III.

take in all circumstances, none ever were, or can be, more great and heroical; and had they been found among the old *Greeks* or *Romans*, they would have been celebrated with the most labour'd and magnificent encomiums. But when men set themselves to magnify the powers of reason, and run down revelation, every thing, in the latter, has a *low* and *invidious* turn given to it; the most godlike virtues lose their lustre; and the most exalted scheme of morality is debas'd and vilified; as in the case we have been considering, Christianity is represented as being defective for what is its chief excellency, and renders it vastly preferable to any system of moral philosophy, or any institution of religion, that ever appeared in the world.

LET us then be persuaded to cultivate, to the utmost, disinterested and universal benevolence; for what is the perfection of our religion must also be the rectitude and honour of our nature.—Let our constant aim be the

76 *The perfection of the Christian, &c.*

SERM. good of mankind.—Let us enlarge our

III. minds, daily, from little narrow prejudices, that all our private pleasures, our friendships, our regards to our country, may be regulated with a view to this as their ultimate end.—Nay, if it were possible, we should extend our thoughts beyond our own species, and take in *the whole universe of rational beings*; for the more unbounded scope we give to our generous benevolence and compassion, the more truly noble it is; and the more nearly do we resemble the supreme fountain of goodness, whose *tender mercies are over all his works*.





S E R M O N I V .

Of the image of God in man; or
the excellency of human nature.

GEN. i. ver. 7. the former part.

*So God created man in his own
image, in the image of God
created he him.*



HERE is no part of know-SERM.
ledge more considerable than IV.
a right knowledge of human nature: It is of the utmost
importance towards the regular conduct
of life; and all the errors of mankind
in point of morality, *i. e.* the most fatal
errors that reasonable creatures can be
guilty of, are certainly owing to their

SERM. not understanding, or not seriously con-

IV. sidering, their own frame and constitution : And yet it may well be wonder'd at, that men should be such great strangers to the design of *their own* nature, and of all the objects of knowledge, know the least of *themselves* ; of *themselves*, I say, whom they are fond of even to excess, and whose welfare they necessarily desire, but while they continue in this state of ignorance cannot pursue : For unless we examine into our own make, and consider the powers and capacities wherewith we are endued, and the ends which the great Author of our being design'd us for, 'tis impossible we should understand our *duty*, or our *happiness*.

INDEED, human nature has been represented in so *base, disagreeable, and monstrous* a form, that the contemplation of it must needs be frightful and shocking to a generous mind ; as having lost its noble powers of reason and liberty, and being the seat of nothing but irregular, impure, and mischievous passions ; as incapable of any thing that is good and virtuous,

tuous, and prone to all manner of vice SERM.
and wickedness.—And if this were true, IV.
who could take any satisfaction in look-
ing into himself, when he must behold
such a *hideous picture of deformity*?—
But, thanks be to God, the honour of
our nature may be easily vindicated from
such unjust reproaches, as will, I hope,
evidently appear from the ensuing dis-
course; and, besides, such an account of
it is, in its direct consequences, of the
utmost prejudice to the interests of re-
ligion and morality: For as, on the one
hand, a right sense of the dignity of hu-
man nature inspires great designs, leads
to the most beneficent, generous, and
godlike actions, and is a strong preser-
vative from every thing that is vile and
dishonourable; so, on the other, when
it is described as having nothing excellent
or amiable in it, and as a complication
of *mean-spiritedness, ill-nature, ignorance*
and *vice*; and when, upon this founda-
tion, injustice, cruelty, ingratitude, pride,
revenge, and the worst of villanies are
represented as *natural* to mankind; this
has a manifest tendency to encourage their

SERM. degenerate and licentious practices, and

IV. furnishes them with an excuse for their wickedness, viz. the *necessary* corruption and depravity of their nature. And finally, if this be a true *picture* of human nature, what must we think of the *great original* from which it was copied? must not the giving such a character of it be highly dishonourable to the supreme and immutable perfection of its glorious author? The consequence is plain and undeniable: For *God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.* In discoursing farther on these words, I shall,

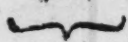
I. Shew, wherein the image of the Deity, in man, consists; and that not only the *first parents* of the human race, but *all mankind since*, notwithstanding the corrupt and degenerate state of the world, were originally formed after the image of God. And,

II. Conclude with some proper and useful inferences.

I. I AM to shew wherein the image SERM.
of the Deity, in man, consists; and that IV.
not only the *first parents* of the human
race, but *all mankind since*, notwithstanding
the corrupt and degenerate state of
the world, were originally formed after
the image of God. Some commentators
have imagined, that by the image of God,
in which he created our first parents, is
meant a *visible splendor*, a *glory* that con-
stantly attended them, and resembled, in
some degree, the *Shechinah*, which was
the glorious symbol of the divine pre-
sence: But this is matter of mere con-
jecture, and of very little consequence in
itself. I shall therefore insist no longer
upon it, but proceed to mention some
things that are more plain and certain,
and of general and evident importance.

MAN is a being partly *sensitive*, and
partly *rational*. There can be no resem-
blance of his great Creator in the sensi-
tive part of his frame, because HE is a
pure and infinite spirit: And therefore
when bodily parts, and such passions as
frail men experience, are attributed to

SERM. the great God in Scripture, we must un-

IV.  derstand such descriptions, as used in con-
descension to our weakness, and narrow
imperfect conceptions of things; and in-
terpret them in such a manner, as will
make them consistent with plain passages
that assert the *spirituality* of the divine na-
ture, and with the reason and nature of
things. It remains then, that man can
bear the image of the Deity only in his
intelligent nature. And,

1st. HE resembles his Creator in his
reason and *understanding*; whereby he is
capable of making very considerable im-
provements in knowledge, and of dis-
covering all those truths which are ne-
cessary to the right management of his
conduct, and to secure his perfection and
happiness: in that he is not impelled and
determined by mere instinct, but is capa-
ble of considering and examining the na-
ture and consequences of things, and of
making a deliberate and wise choice:
And this, very probably, is one of the
principal things intended in the text. For
God, having finished the inanimate and
animal

animal creation, is describ'd, as proceed-
ing to the making a being in his own
image, after his likeness, i. e. a *reason-*
able creature, who must, consequently,
resemble him the *supreme* and most *per-*
fect reason; and the great privilege de-
signed to be conferred upon this being
was a dominion over the inferior crea-
tures, in order to which reason was ab-
solutely necessary. And because reason
is the most eminent distinction and glory
of the human nature, by which man, as
lord of the lower world, is highly ad-
vanced above the other beings that inha-
bit it, 'tis not unlikely, that the histo-
rian represents the Deity as proceeding to
this part of his creation with *peculiar ce-*
remony, to do honour thereby to this
excellent nature, and give us a becom-
ing sense of its importance and dignity.
But,

2dly. THE image of God, in man, has
a respect, farther, to the *moral rectitude*
in which he was created. The rational
principle within him *strongly* directed to
all the duties of piety; to the practice
of justice; and the exercise of benevo-
lence,

SERM. lence, one of the brightest characters of

IV. the Deity, in all its branches ; to which
 ~~~~~ last virtue he was also excited by *peculiar*  
 instincts, that it was impossible for him  
 entirely to suppress without losing huma-  
 nity itself. And as to his passions, they  
 were all in a regular state, and subject to  
 the government of reason ; which was ca-  
 pable of keeping them within their pro-  
 per bounds, that they might not, at any  
 time, be extravagant and disorderly. This  
 was the *first* happy state of man. And in  
 consequence of his understanding, the  
 great compass of his rational powers, his  
 moral rectitude, and, particularly, the kind  
 and benevolent affections of his nature,  
 (in which consisted his more immediate  
 resemblance of his Maker) he was ap-  
 pointed to exercise dominion over the in-  
 ferior creatures ; and so to be the *represen-*  
*tative* of the great author and governor  
 of nature in this lower world, and dis-  
 pense his authority. I have given this  
 short and general account of the image  
 of God in man, that I might have time  
 to demonstrate, what is of the greatest  
 impor-



importance, and the only thing that SERM.  
can make a discourse on this subject use- IV.  
ful to us, *viz.* That, in all these re-  
spects, not only the *first parents* of man-  
kind, but their *descendants*, were origi-  
nally formed after the divine image.  
And,

1<sup>st</sup>. NONE will deny that mankind are  
*reasonable* creatures, how much soever  
they may be inclined to diminish the *ex-*  
*cellency*, and weaken the force of human  
reason: And, I think, it can, with as  
little justice, be denied, that the reason  
of mankind is able, in all important in-  
stances, to distinguish between right and  
wrong, good and evil; and that their in-  
tellectual faculties are of very *large ex-*  
*tent*, formed for making great and won-  
derful discoveries, and capable of being,  
for ever, enlarged and improved; so  
that, as reasonable creatures, they still  
evidently retain the image of God. And  
this, I believe, will be easily allowed; and  
the only question will be, whether man-  
kind, in their *original formation*, before  
they

SERM. they are perverted and corrupted by pre-  
 IV. judices of education and custom, the  
 influence of evil examples, and vicious  
 habits wilfully contracted, still retain the  
 image of God, with respect to *moral rec-  
 titude*.

Now that this is really the case ap-  
 pears from hence, that they have under-  
 standing to direct the impulses and af-  
 fections of the animal nature, to consider  
 when they are to be indulged, and when  
 restrained, to form just notions of happi-  
 ness, and regulate the desire of present  
 sensitive pleasure, that it may not interfere  
 with the rectitude of their higher powers,  
 and the exercise of benevolence towards  
 their fellow-creatures ; that, having a  
 principle of reason and liberty, they must  
 be capable of knowing, loving, and serv-  
 ing God their Creator, and supreme gover-  
 nor, and of the pleasures of mutual be-  
 nevolence and friendship, as well as of  
 governing their animal passions, by keep-  
 ing them within due bounds, and con-  
 trouling them when they grow licentious  
 and extravagant ; and that this is the *di-  
 rect tendency* of human nature, even in  
 its

its present state. For human nature, even SERM.  
in its present constitution, is a reasonable IV.  
nature, and the reasonable nature of man  
has no *evil* tendency, but directs to the  
pursuit of wisdom and virtue, and to sup-  
press all corrupt desires.

FOR instance, is it not *agreeable to hu-*  
*man nature* to reverence the great author  
and governour of the world, and secure  
his protection and favour, on whom we  
absolutely depend, by an imitation of his  
perfections, and obedience to his com-  
mands? does not *nature* teach us to be  
just and charitable, to compassionate the  
miserable, and relieve the distress'd? are  
not these virtues suitable to our *strongest*  
*affections* and *instincts*? and the contrary  
vices, by the universal consent of man-  
kind, branded as *inhuman* and *monstrous*?  
Again, is it not *natural* to us to seek and  
endeavour to promote our own happiness,  
and, consequently, to mortify all those evil  
appetites, which are the sources of corrup-  
tion and misery? Or does our *nature* di-  
rect us to rebel against the author of our  
being, to prey upon our own kind, to de-  
light in oppression and injustice, and in the  
misery of our fellow-creatures, and to be  
agitated



SERM. agitated by wild and extravagant desires,  
 IV. which sink us even below the condition  
 of brutes? Mankind may, indeed, degenerate into this miserable state, but, still, all must allow that this is not *human nature*, but a most dreadful *depravation* of it; for our reasonable nature teaches us to abhor these things: So that, according to *Solomon's* observation, in all ages of the world, *God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.* For the *original integrity* of human nature does not consist in having no temptations to vice, but in being able to subdue and conquer such temptations: Which it must be capable of doing as it has reason to direct it to what is right and fit to be done, and a power of choosing freely, and consequently of acting according to its right judgment of things.

Ecclef. vii.  
 29.

It must, after all, be confess'd, that there is a *sickness* and *disorder*, in our mortal frame, introduced by the fall, which, considering the closeness and intimacy of their union, may be supposed, in some measure, to affect the mind: It may be a clog upon our reasoning powers,  
 and

and strengthen the animal passions: But SERM.  
this is entirely a *natural*, and not a *moral* IV.  
defect; which can't arise, in any in-  
stance, from bodily constitution, but on-  
ly from a perverseness and depravity of  
the will: And such natural disorders are  
only, like external objects and circum-  
stances, *occasions* of, and *temptations* to  
vice, and consequently of no weight  
against any part of the preceding argu-  
ment.

THE grand foundation of men's error,  
in judging of these things, has been this,  
either that they have taken their estimate  
of human nature from the *sensitive* and  
*brutal* part of it, and not from the *in-*  
*telligent* and *moral*, and represented to  
their minds, as the *original* state of it,  
such evil dispositions and habits as are of  
their own creating; or else, that they  
have understood particular passages of  
scripture, which give the character of  
the most profligate and abandon'd sin-  
ners, as describing the *natural* temper of  
all mankind; and strained strong *figura-*  
*tive* expressions, which are very frequent  
in the eastern languages, to their highest  
sense,

SERM. sense, contrary to the general design of  
 IV. the revelation, as well as the plain reason  
 of things: And, indeed, if persons will  
 proceed in such an *undistinguishing* way,  
 'tis no wonder they bring themselves to  
 believe any thing, however absurd and  
 in itself incredible. Let me only add,  
 that as it is a plain and obvious truth,  
 how much soever men's partial views of  
 things, and misapprehension of some  
 doubtful passages of scripture may con-  
 found and darken it; that human nature,  
 even in its present state, is a reasonable  
 nature, and that to such a nature as this  
 vice and wickedness, of all kinds, is neces-  
 sarily repugnant: besides, I say, that this  
 is an obvious truth; such a sense of things,  
 which is so much the honour of human  
 nature, and of the great God, who form-  
 ed it to resemble his own perfections,  
 must yield abundant satisfaction to every  
 pious and every generous mind.

I SHALL but just mention, that man con-  
 tinues still to bear the image of God, in  
 respect of his dominion over the inferior  
 creatures. The *inanimate*, *vegetable*, and  
*animal* world are useful to him various  
 ways;



ways; some by their labour; others for SERM.  
food and clothing; and not only admi- IV.  
nister to his necessities, but contribute,  
jointly, to the convenience and ornament  
of life: And it may be questioned, whe-  
ther it would be possible for him, in some  
instances, to exercise his dominion in the  
manner he now does, were it not for a  
kind of *instinct* planted in the nature of  
animals, to acknowledge him as their su-  
perior lord. But I dismiss this head, and  
proceed,

II. To make some useful inferences  
from what has been said. And,

1<sup>st</sup>. LET us be thankful to God for  
having so distinguished and *honoured* our  
nature, as to form it after his own image.  
Our *rational* and *moral* powers, by which  
we resemble the Deity, are the chief ex-  
cellency and advantage of our nature: By  
these we are eminently advanced above  
the brute creatures, rendered capable of  
the pleasures of society and friendship,  
and of improvements in knowledge and  
virtue: 'Tis by means of these powers,

SERM. that we *alone*, of the whole visible world,  
 IV. are fitted to contemplate the great Author  
 of the universe, and celebrate the glory  
 of his perfections. Are we not then under the strongest ties of gratitude, by our united praises, to excite, in one another's minds, a warm and affectionate sense of his goodness, and a generous ambition of imitating his most excellent character? Shall we omit a duty, for which we are so *peculiarly* formed, and the obligation to which arises, immediately, from our very make and constitution? And as the noble faculties, with which he has adorned our minds, qualify us for paying him a *voluntary* homage and obedience, shall we not testify our sense of this high favour by the most entire and chearful resignation, and devotedness to his service?

ALL the laws, by which he governs us, are the result of most perfect wisdom and goodness, and calculated to promote our supreme perfection and felicity; and therefore piety, justice, charity, and temperance, or the regulating our affections and desires, are essentially our duty by the very frame of our nature: And if we are wilfully deficient in any one branch of it;  
 if

if we are thoughtless and inconsiderate, and negligent of our actions, we are unworthy the name of *reasonable* creatures, and highly affront the wise and bountiful Author of our beings, who hath bestowed that excellent character upon us.

SERM.

IV.

2dly. LET us maintain a just sense of the *worth* and *dignity* of our nature, as we have the *honour* to be formed after the image of God: I mean, that we should value it in such a degree, as is necessary to enable us to support our character, and inspire sentiments of generosity and virtue. 'Tis a *laudable* greatness of mind to preserve such an opinion of the excellency of our nature, as shall restrain from base and disgraceful actions: And no thought will more effectually answer this end, than that of our being made in the likeness of the greatest and best of beings: Shall such a one dishonour himself so far, as to relinquish the noble entertainments of the mind, which are peculiar to rational beings, for those gross and sensual gratifications, which he enjoys in common with inferiour and irrational creatures? and thereby, from being exalted to a resemblance of the Deity, sink into the condi-



SERM. tion of a *mere animal*? An ingenuous spirit would reject all temptations of this kind with *scorn* and *indignation*.

IV.

OR shall I consent to become *viler* than a brute, by rooting out of my nature the principles of benevolence and compassion, which are the most lovely and adorable perfections of the supreme being, and making myself a *monster* of cruelty and revenge?

WHEN reason, which, by the skilful hand that formed us, was placed in the seat of government, is subjected to blind and headstrong appetites, and we are the *slaves* and the *sport* of passion; when we are ashamed of a wise and regular conduct, and steady adherence to the rules of religion, or afraid of the consequences, and sacrifice our virtue to worldly honour and advantage; when our intelligent and active powers, which are fitted for such noble purposes, and high employments, are lost in *indolence* and *sloth*; when, instead of being useful to others, and cultivating in our minds habits of justice, and universal charity, we practise oppression, fraud, and injury; alas! how wofully is that excellent nature *debased*, which was  
formed

formed for such high advancement, and SERM.  
even for godlike perfection? Where is, IV.  
then, the *amiable image* of the Deity, our  
chief ornament and glory! Nay, I may  
ask, where is *humanity* itself? For 'tis  
reason alone that makes men of us, and is  
the most distinguishing part we bear of  
the divine image; and therefore *as men*,  
and creatures resembling the great Author  
of our beings, we ought to have a just and  
constant sense of the dignity of our rea-  
sonable nature, that we may never be  
tempted to do any thing unworthy of it.

3dly. THE notion, that man was made  
after the image of God, teaches us to love,  
respect, and honour our fellow creatures,  
as well as to set a just value on ourselves:  
For the affection and respect being due to  
*human nature*, or rather to the degrees of  
*reason* and *moral perfection*, its resemblance  
of the Deity, which appear in it, is  
equally due to it in my neighbour as in my  
own person; and can't be with-held with-  
out doing injustice, and shewing contempt  
both to the *image*, and *original*. Cruelty,  
even to brute creatures, is a certain sign of  
a very base and degenerate mind; but it  
must be attended with peculiar aggravati-

SERM. ons, when 'tis exercised towards such as

IV. bear a resemblance of our Maker : And  
 therefore 'tis very remarkable, that when  
 God appointed, by an express command,  
 that murderers should be punished with  
 death, this reason is assign'd for it, *for in*

Gen. ix. 6. *the image of God made be man.*

UPON the same account every lower injury must be criminal in proportion ; and the contrary duties of benevolence and mercy necessary and indispensable. And, doubtless, 'tis for this reason, among others, that the love of God and of our neighbour, are represented, in scripture, as having an inseparable connection with each other ; which, indeed, is very evident, even from the nature of the thing. And since ALL mankind are made after the likeness of God, our good-will to them must be *universal* : For we act a very contradictory and inconsistent part, if we profess a reverence and esteem of the God of *human nature*, the Father of *the spirits of all flesh*, and pretend to celebrate the glory of his *universal* goodness ; and, at the same time, confine our good offices to a particular *family, nation, or religious profession* ; and are hard-hearted to all the rest, who,



who, equally, bear the impresson of his SERM.  
excellent and divine image. IV.

AGAIN, as we believe that we were made in the image of God, and to act in imitation of his example, 'tis our duty to exercise our dominion over brute animals with *lenity, moderation, and mercy*: For by unnecessary severities and cruelties towards them, we manifest a barbarous and savage temper of mind, and consequently that we have lost those sentiments of goodness and pity, which are our most glorious resemblance of the great Creator; and act contrary to those excellent rules, which he himself adheres to in the government of the universe. And I can't help observing upon this occasion, that our treatment of brute creatures, who, in respect of their many services to mankind, as well as from the regard due to our *common Creator*, have a claim to much better usage from us, must be matter of great uneasiness to persons of a benevolent and generous disposition; not only upon the account of the misery which they endure; but because the barbarous instruments of their misery are so far from having that merciful temper, which the Christian religion recommends,

SERM. that they seem, almost, to have forgot  
 IV. common humanity.

*4thly.* SINCE no part of the image of God appears in the constitution of our bodies, and the animal frame, but all in the intelligent nature ; let us not value ourselves chiefly upon health, strength, beauty, or any other enjoyments that are external to the mind, but upon cultivating our rational powers, and our moral perfection ; or, in the language of scripture, on our being *created, after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness.*

FINALLY, we learn, from what has been said, to value the Christian religion, the chief view of which is to purify and exalt human reason, obscur'd and debas'd by superstition and vice, and restore the *original rectitude* of our nature : This great design it is very wisely adapted to promote. For the laws of this excellent revelation have a necessary tendency to the supreme perfection and happiness of reasonable beings ; and it inforces the observation of them, in which consists our nearest and most honourable conformity to the nature of God, by the most important and encouraging motives. By the gospel, *the wrath*  
 of

*or the excellency of human nature.* 99

*of God is revealed from heaven, against* SERM.  
*all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,* IV.  
*who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* ~~~~~

Therein, likewise, are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of a divine nature; particularly the promise of a glorious resurrection to eternal life, when the faculties of the mind will be *enlarged*, and its pleasures more *pure* and *substantial*; and when even this corruptible and animal frame will be raised a *spiritual body*, and put on *incorruption* and *immortality*; and consequently, instead of being a clog upon the rational nature, be assisting to it in its most *refined* operations. Then it will be seen, in a much more glorious manner than it ever has been in this world, or than it could have been if mankind had retained their primitive innocence, that *God made man in his own image*: Then the human nature will appear in its fullest *lustre* and *dignity*.

I CAN'T conclude without observing, that even the *positive* institutions of Christianity are calculated to advance the same blessed design, namely, to restore and perfect the image of the Deity in us; as, by  
their



SERM. their tendency to establish and confirm  
IV. good dispositions, they assist and promote  
the pursuit of *real* and *Godlike* virtue.  
Let us be persuaded therefore, in the use  
of those means which our holy religion  
prescribes, to get as great a resemblance  
of our Maker, in his *moral* character, as  
is possible; that we may hereafter be  
admitted into the regions of light and  
immortality, where we shall be more  
completely *like him*, because we shall *see*  
*him as he is*, and improve in this likeness,  
and, consequently, in honour and felicity  
for ever.





## S E R M O N V.

God not an arbitrary being.

---

R O M. ix. 20.

*Nay, but, O man, who art thou  
that repliest against God ?---*

 H O' religion be in itself most SERM.  
excellent, and founded on the V.  
highest reason, there is a great  
deal of skill and judgment  
required in order to a rational and success-  
ful defence of it. We ought not only  
to understand it thoroughly ourselves,  
before we attempt to recommend it to  
others, but should take care to support  
it by none but *solid* arguments, that will  
bear being examined, and stand the test  
of

SERM. of a strict and critical enquiry; and to  
 V. give *proper* answers to the objections of  
 its adversaries. For, by an ill management, we may injure and expose the best cause in the world; and when the opposers of religion find that our arguments for it are weak and trifling, they will easily be persuaded to triumph, as if they had gained a complete victory; and imagining, tho' without just ground, that this is all that can be said in vindication of it, their prejudices will be more strong and invincible: This is especially true with respect to our reasonings about the *providence* of God, upon which all religion depends. The same way of answering objections will not do in all cases; but, on the contrary, what may be very properly urged at one time, will, at another, leave the truth quite naked and defenceless; nay, in the opinion of the ignorant and prejudiced, strengthen the cause of *infidelity*.

Thus the words of the text were very *pertinently* applied by St. Paul, as I shall have occasion to shew in the following discourse; but have been used by others, who

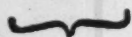


who overlook the particular case of which SERM.  
the apostle was treating, in answer to ob- V.  
jections to which they are by no means  
adapted; objections that are really *unan-*  
*swerable*, being against supposed methods  
of conduct in the Deity, which are abso-  
lutely inconsistent with justice and good-  
ness: And since, besides this, such prin-  
ciples have been inferred from them, as  
represent the supreme and most perfect  
Being under the character of a mere *ar-*  
*bitrary* sovereign; and render it impos-  
sible for us to *judge of*, or *argue from* his  
moral perfections, which are the only  
foundation of amiable conceptions of him,  
and of the true peace and comfort of  
men's minds, as well as the surest rule  
we have to direct us in our religious en-  
quiries; I think I cannot employ your  
time more profitably, than in settling the  
true sense of this text, and guarding it  
against misconstructions: Especially if it  
be considered, that 'tis but too natural  
for unthinking people to make ill uses of  
it, injurious to the honour of God, and  
the cause of piety and virtue. I shall  
therefore,

I. POINT

SERM.

V.



I. POINT out two or three things that are not imply'd in it.

II. PROPOSE a few cases, to which, if they could happen, and were urg'd as objections against the providence of God, it would not be a sufficient and rational reply. And then,

III. SHEW to what cases these words may be properly applied.

I. I AM to point out two or three things that are not implied in the text, but are false and groundless inferences from it. And,

1<sup>st</sup>. WE ought not to infer from it, that God is a despotic *arbitrary* Sovereign, whose *will* is the only rule of his actions. The great God, tho' he be supreme, and accountable to none, always governs himself by the eternal and unalterable rules of wisdom, equity, and goodness: His will is not, *itself*, the standard and measure of right; but there is an intrinsic necessary difference, in the

*nature of things*, between just and unjust, SERM.  
beneficence and cruelty, that cannot be V.

altered by the authority, will, or determination of any being whatsoever. Indeed, what God wills is always right and fit; always, upon the whole, fittest and best. But why? not merely because he *wills* it, but because he is necessarily wise, just, and good. For can any man imagine, that if he should will to deceive, to vex and torment his innocent creatures, and employ his infinite power only to make them miserable (which is a very possible supposition, if his *will alone* be the rule of his proceedings) such a conduct would be *justifiable*; nay, for even this must be maintained as a necessary consequence from such principles, that it would be *better* and more *praise-worthy* than righteousness, truth, and mercy?

THERE cannot be a more dishonourable reflection on the Deity, than to suppose he acts without a reason, merely from *humour* and *arbitrary pleasure*: It represents him as a *tyrant*, not as a *wise* and *righteous* Governour: It renders him *frightful* to our contemplations, the object



SERM. ject of *aversion* and *horror*, and destroys  
 V. all rational esteem and love of him, and  
 confidence in him: All expectations of  
 favour from him must sink and vanish  
 at once. For who knows how such a  
*capricious* being, who is not determined  
 by reason and justice, but makes his will  
 his only law; who can know, I say, in  
 what manner he will act?—What pos-  
 sible assurance can there be, that he will  
 not resolve on the *misery*; and *ruin*, of  
 his rational creatures? Nay, if he has  
 promised the contrary, can we have any  
 probability that the same *arbitrary* will  
 that made, will not also break the pro-  
 mise? Mere will and humour are *fickle*,  
*uncertain*, *changeable* things; but truth  
 and goodness are *steady* principles, and a  
 solid foundation for our trust and hope.  
 I shall only add, that the representing  
 the Deity in this manner renders him in-  
 finitely more *formidable* than any *earth-*  
*ly tyrants* ever were, or can be, even  
 those who have been the greatest scourges  
 and plagues to mankind, because he is  
 possessor of almighty and uncontrollable  
 power; and the thought of almighty  
 power,

power, that is not directed by wisdom SERM.  
and goodness, must fill the mind with V.  
the utmost *astonishment* and *terror*.—Shall  
we then give such a *reproachful*, such a  
*detestable* character of the most perfect,  
the most amiable of all beings? ———  
Shall we picture the very *best* of beings  
as the very *worst*? ——— And represent  
him, in whose unerring wisdom, strict  
impartial justice, and universal unchange-  
able goodness, the whole rational world  
have the highest reason to *rejoice*, as one  
that every wise man must wish *not to*  
*exist*.

2dly. It can't be inferr'd from the text,  
that men are not to inquire into the rea-  
sons of God's proceedings; or that they  
are, in no cases, able to judge of the jus-  
tice of his methods of Providence. For  
God himself, in the scriptures, frequently  
*appeals* to mankind concerning the equi-  
ty of the general rules of his providential  
government: From whence 'tis plain that  
even he, that most perfect being, who  
is directed by absolute and invariable rea-  
son, would not have us *believe implicit-*  
*ly* that any thing is just because he does

SERM. it; but only requires of us to approve  
 V. of it so far, as we can reconcile it to the  
 general principles of justice and equity. In making this appeal God evidently supposes, that the *reason* of mankind is not only capable of judging in *matters of religion*, but of determining concerning *his actions*; at least concerning the fitness of the *general rules*, by which he governs the world: And therefore, men are *overmodest*, when they refuse to allow their reason that honour which the great Creator himself has done it; when they represent it as blind and erroneous in cases of the highest importance; and as knowing no more, and having no more distinct and proper ideas of the moral perfections of the supreme Governour, than the brutes that are void of understanding. Little do they consider how much they dishonour and disparage the *infinite wisdom* of God, when they disgrace and vilify their own reason; how much, I say, they dishonour the infinite wisdom of God, who hath appealed to this *discarded, abandoned* reason to decide in points of the utmost consequence, and as the  
 rule



rule by which we must be *ultimately* con- SERM.  
ducted in all our religious enquiries: For, V.  
indeed, whether God had appealed to it  
or no, men must, if they think, neces-  
sarily follow its directions; and no au-  
thority whatever, however it may *restrain*  
and *terrify*, can make them *believe* any  
principles, or approve of any actions as  
*just* and *right*, which are evidently re-  
pugnant to it.

AND if we are capable of judging con-  
cerning the *equity* of those rules by which  
the divine government is exercised, the  
*general principles* of justice must be the  
same both with respect to God and man.  
If they are different with respect to our  
Maker, and are something *mysterious*, and  
*incomprehensible*, *we know not what*, 'tis  
impossible we should be able to determine,  
in any instance, whether the divine con-  
duct be just, or unjust; for how can we  
judge *without ideas*? And thus an essen-  
tial perfection of the Deity will be im-  
possible to be demonstrated by us, which,  
notwithstanding, is a fundamental prin-  
ciple of all religion. Indeed there may

SERM. be difficulties, to such imperfect and  
 V. short-sighted creatures as we are, in judg-  
 ~~~~~ ing of *particular actings* of providence,  
 for want of understanding the *entire scheme*
 that the great governour of the world is
 pursuing; but if we suppose that God
 himself can, for instance, punish his
 creatures for what they could not help,
 and yet be clear of the charge of *in-*
justice, we confound and destroy the ne-
 cessary and immutable distinction be-
 tween good and evil; and make it im-
 possible for mankind to imitate his moral
 perfections, in which their highest ho-
 nour and happiness consists. We could,
 then, have no probability what kind of
 behaviour was likely to be pleasing to him,
 nor what scheme of religion was most
 worthy of him: Nay, we could not be
 sure that the *best* of men would not be
 the objects of his displeasure, and the
worst his peculiar favourites; and, con-
 sequently, the practice of religion, and
 pursuit of virtue, would really be, as its
 enemies misrepresent it, no better than
enthusiasm.

AND

God not an arbitrary being.

III

AND from what has been said it necessarily follows, that the supreme being will never think we do him honour, if we give such an account of the conduct of his providence, as contradicts *our natural notions of justice and equity*: Nay, to say that he is *unjust* may be more honourable to him, than to give him the character of a *righteous* being. For upon the supposition that the general notion of justice is *quite distinct*, in God, from what it is in man; if we say the Deity is unjust, we say a thing of which we have no certain determinate idea; and, consequently, nothing that is directly injurious to his absolute perfection: The word injustice is a mere *empty sound*, without meaning. But if we affirm that he may deceive his creatures, or punish them beyond what their iniquities deserve, we represent him, *really*, as an evil, vicious being, one whom every wise and good man must abhor; and, consequently, fix a reproach upon his character, that no *nominal compliments* can atone for. For even such imperfect creatures as we, if

SERM.

V.

SERM. *just* and *good* were made to signify *tyranny* and *cruelty*, should be so far from being fond of accepting the title, that we should reject it, if it was offered us, with disdain and indignation.

THERE is a phrase commonly used, which, perhaps, has led some persons into the mistakes I have been guarding against, *viz.* that the end which God designs, in all his actions, in the creation and providential government of the world, is *his own glory*. The expression itself is, undoubtedly, capable of a just and rational sense; but has been grossly misapplied, and made to signify, what it can never fairly signify, something *distinct* from, and even *inconsistent* with, the exercise of justice and goodness. And, indeed, 'tis natural for men to interpret it agreeable to the notions they entertain of God; and, consequently, with persons whose apprehensions are different, it will have a quite different meaning, and be either true, or false, as their apprehensions are rational or otherwise. Thus, if men conceive of God as a mere *absolute sovereign*,

reign, according to them, his glory must consist in the exercise of an *uncontroulable* and *unaccountable* sovereignty, and every thing will be right, merely because he wills it, and has resistless power to effect it. But this, I have shewn, is figuring the almighty being as a *tyrant*, who delights in nothing but lawless will, and arbitrary dominion; whereas the true glory of a sovereign is in the wisdom, justice, and clemency of his government. Again, if we imagine it to be the chief attribute of the Deity, that he is *strict* and *rigorous* in punishing; his glory will be most eminently displayed when he is most *stiff* and *inexorable*, when he has most of *stern*, *inflexible* severity, and least of *mercy*. But if we believe him to be necessarily *wise*, *righteous*, and *good*, it will then be his chief glory to exercise an *equal* and *impartial*, but, at the same time, a *gracious* providence over all his creatures; and invariably to pursue the fittest measures to promote the *general good*. And I may appeal to all mankind, if they will lay aside their prejudices, and consult only their reason, whether this does

SERM. not give a vastly more honourable and

V. amiable notion of him, than the describing him either as an *arbitrary sovereign*, or an *unrelenting judge*. The glory of God can't be a distinct consideration from the exercise of his moral perfections for the happiness of his creatures, because in this view he appears most excellent, and in the highest honour and dignity, as creator and governor of the universe, and the compassionate father of all intelligent beings: And a defect in *power*, *knowledge*, or *extent of dominion*, would not stain and obscure his glory, in any degree of comparison, like acts of *injustice*, and *cruelty*. I proceed now,

2dly. HAVING pointed out some general principles that are falsely inferred from the text, *Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?* to mention, briefly, a few cases, to which if they could happen, and were urged as objections against the providence of God, it would not be a *sufficient*, and *rational* reply. And, in general, such an answer must be very *weak* and *trifling* in all cases,

God not an arbitrary being.

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cases, that are evidently repugnant to justice and goodness. Thus, if we could suppose, that God had absolutely deter-

SERM.
V.

mined the final and eternal misery of great numbers of his rational creatures; or that he tempted and excited them to sin; that he enjoined impracticable duties, and punished any for not believing or not doing impossibilities; if these extravagant things, I say, could be supposed of the supreme and all-perfect being, who is *righteous in all his ways*, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*; it would be the most *impertinent* thing in the world, to think to satisfy the reason of mankind by resolving all into his *sovereignty*, and saying, *Who art thou, that repliest against God?* The *sovereignty* of God, and his right to act as he pleases in cases where justice is not concerned, is not the thing disputed, but his *equity* and *goodness*; which can only be vindicated by shewing, either that the above-mentioned methods of acting are not instances of *arbitrariness* and *cruelty*, or that *arbitrariness* and *cruelty*, which are reckon'd monstrous

SERM. monstrous crimes in all other beings, are

V. no *blemishes* in God's government of the world.

INDEED, had I a notion of the supreme Creator and Father of mankind (I speak it with quite different sentiments, and with the highest esteem and reverence of his moral character) but had I really a notion of him as destitute of equity and benevolence, and acting only for the ostentation of his supreme power, and sovereign dominion, I might, perhaps, think it *prudent* not to complain, that I might not expose myself to the resentment of so terrible an enemy ;—but would there be ever the less *reason* for complaint? The *mouth* of the *objector* might be stopped by his fears ;——but would the *force* of the *objection* be at all abated? It could not be, as long as there remained any difference in actions, any distinction of just or unjust. For if *power alone* does not constitute right (and if it does, the most powerful, in every degree, must be *universally*, and without *exception*, the most righteous) the *greatest* being, be his power

power ever so extensive, and his domi- SERM.
nion ever so uncontroulable, can have no V.
more authority to be unjust and cruel
than the meanest; but, on the contrary,
will be, in proportion, a more *evil* and
mischievous being, and more justly the ob-
ject of universal abhorrence. It remains
to be enquired,

3dly. To what cases the words of the
text may be *properly* applied. Now this
will be best determined by considering
the particular argument the apostle was
pursuing, and to which they immediately
relate. In the 2d and 3d verses of this
chapter, he laments, in a very *pathetic*
manner, the dismal fate of his country-
men, who were cast off from being the
people of God, and devoted to destruc-
tion, for their wilful opposition to the
gospel, after they had long been distin-
guished by peculiar and extraordinary
privileges. In the 6th verse he insinu-
ates an objection, *viz.* that by rejecting
the *Jews*, the *word*, or promise of *God*,
which was made to the seed of *Abraham*,
would not have its *effect*; and, in answer

to

SERM. to it, observes these two things. 1st. That
 V. the descendants of *Jacob*, or *Israel*, did
 not make up the whole of *Israel*, or
 the people of God comprehended in the
 promise; but as he argues more distinctly
 in the 4th chapter of this Epistle,
ver. 11, &c. all those *Gentiles* were in-
 cluded, who trod in the steps of *Abra-*
ham's faith; and, consequently, the call-
 ing them to the advantages of the *Mef-*
siab's kingdom was not *frustrating*, but
fulfilling the promise. And, 2^{dly}. That
 the promise was never made to all the
natural race of *Abraham*. This he proves,
ver. 9. from the words of the promise
 itself, *at this time will I come; and*
Sarah shall have a son. Nor was this
 the only limitation of the seed of *Abra-*
ham; for, as he adds, *when Rebecca also*
had conceived by one, even by our Father
Isaac (the children being not yet born,
neither having done any good or evil, that
the purpose of God, according to election,
might stand, not of works, but of him that
calleth) it was said unto her, the elder
shall serve the younger. The sense of
 which

which words is plainly this, that " God, SERM.

" while the children were yet in their mo-

V.

" ther's womb, and, consequently, before

" they could, by their actions, either se-

" commend themselves to his favour, or

" merit his displeasure, determined that

" the posterity of *Esau* should serve those

" of *Jacob*; in order to shew, that his

" making any family, or race of men,

" his peculiar people, or, in other words,

" his taking them under his special pro-

" tection, and conferring extraordinary

" advantages upon them, depended on

" his own wise purpose, as having a

" right to bestow his favours on whom

" he pleased, and not on any works and

" deserts of theirs." That this whole

paragraph does not at all relate to *Jacob*

and *Esau* considered *personally* is evident

from hence, that it is not true *personally*,

but only in a *national* sense, that *the*

elder did *serve the younger*. Again, the

text in *Genesis*, to which here is a refer-

ence, proves unquestionably that this was

the only thing intended in the promise :

Two NATIONS are in thy womb, and

SERM. *the one PEOPLE shall be stronger than*

V. *the other PEOPLE, and the elder shall*

serve the younger. And finally, that no-

Gen. xxv.
23.

ted passage, *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*, speaks only of the distinction which God, in his providence, made between the race of *Jacob* and *Esau*, with respect to *temporal* and *outward* advantages. For the words, of which *St. Paul* quotes only the general substance, stand thus in the prophet *Malachi*; *I have loved you, saith the Lord, yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau;—but how!—and laid his mountains and his heritage waste.*

Mal. i.
2, 3,

HAVING sufficiently answered the first objection, the apostle comes to another, verse the 14th. *What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.* “Is it any injustice in God to “chuse one people before another, to “confer upon them extraordinary favours? By no means.” This he argues, with the *Jews*, from several passages in their own Scriptures: And in the

the text, and some following verses (up-
 on which I shall give you the excellent
 paraphrase of the great Mr. *Locke*) he ar-
 gues the same point from the reason of
 the thing. *Nay, but, O man, who art
 thou that repliest against God? Shall the
 thing formed say to him that formed it,
 " Shall the nations that are made great,
 " or little, shall kingdoms that are raised,
 " or depressed, say to him in whose
 " hands they are to dispose of them as
 " he pleases," Why hast thou made me
 thus? Hath not the potter power over the
 clay, of the same lump to make one vessel
 to honour, and another to dishonour? What
 if God willing to shew his wrath, and to
 make his power known, endured, with much
 long-suffering, the vessels of wrath fitted to
 destruction? And that he might make
 known the riches of his glory on the vessels
 of mercy which he had afore prepared un-
 to glory? " What if God, willing to
 " punish the sinful people of the *Jews*,
 " and to do it so as to have his power
 " known and taken notice of in the doing
 " it, bore with them a long time, even
 " after*

SERM.

V.

SERM. " after they had deserved his wrath, as

V. " he did with *Pharaoh*, that his hand

~ " might be the more eminently visible

" in their destruction? And that also

" at the same time he might, with the

" more glory, make known his goodness

" and mercy to the *Gentiles*, whom, ac-

" cording to his purpose, he was in a

" readiness to receive into the glorious state

" of being his people under the gospel?"

I HOPE it appears, from what has been said, that this whole chapter, which has been so confounded and darkened, relates only to God's dealings with *nations* and *collective bodies* of men; and not to his favour or displeasure towards *particular persons*, and determining absolutely, without any regard to their actions, their *eternal state* hereafter. The argument then, that *St. Paul* pursues, is only this, that God might dispense his *extraordinary* favours as he saw fit; and, consequently, eminently distinguish one nation, and pass by others, without the least *injustice*; and that to censure such a way of proceeding, in the

the *proprietor* and *sovereign disposer* of all things, was arrogant and presumptuous. SERM. V.

And from hence we learn to what questions the words of the text may be *properly* and *justly* applied, *viz.* to such as these;—why God vouchsafes a revelation of his will to *some* nations, and not to *others*?—why, for example, he has not made the christian *universal*?—why does he permit *moral* and *natural* evil?—why has he not made all creatures of the *highest order*, and communicated to all *equal degrees* of perfection and happiness? Nothing of this can be shewn to be contrary to justice, because they are, all, favours, which his creatures have no right to *claim*: And therefore in these, and all other cases of a *like* nature, where justice is not concerned; which have no appearance of *malice* or *cruelty*, but are considerations of *wisdom* only; 'tis very *pertinent* and *rational* to say to an objector, *Nay, but, O man, who art though that repliest against God?* We learn from this discourse,

1st. How necessary 'tis that we consider the *uses* to which passages of scrip-

SERM. ture are applied, and don't argue *generally*

V. from what is only adapted to a *particular* case. This is one reason why texts have been so abominably perverted, and strained to such *absurd* and *unnatural* senses, as are not only contrary to their true design, and the general scope and tenor of the revelation, but strike at the foundation of all religion.

2dly. LET us cultivate in our minds the highest reverence of God, especially the most honourable apprehensions of his *moral* character; and being persuaded that all his counsels are the result of *infinite wisdom*, and that his will is ever determined by the *highest reason*, let us humbly acquiesce in all the methods of his providence. Survey the work of God, the exquisite beauty and harmony of the *whole*, the admirable connection and subserviency of the *several parts*; nay, survey *thy own frame*, the curious and astonishing structure of thy body, the noble faculties and capacities of thy mind; and from the surprizing marks of wisdom and goodness, which thou canst *distinctly* perceive, in *thine own make*, and
in

in the whole constitution of things, draw SERM.

the just and natural inference, viz. that V.

the great Author and Governour of the universe is posselt of these perfections in the most *absolute* and *compleat* manner; and, consequently, that all things are contrived and ordered with the same *wise* and *benevolent* view; tho', in particulars, it does not appear *equally*, and in some, perhaps, *not at all*, to thy limited understanding.

THE improving constantly in our minds worthy notions of God, as a being supremely *wise*, and immutably *just* and *good*, will be attended with very great advantages.—It will restrain that impertinent humour of *scepticism* and *cavilling*, which makes men oppose their ignorance and prejudices to his infinite wisdom.—We shall always consider the Deity as the most *amiable* and *delightful* object of our contemplation; neither as a weak capricious being, whom we cannot *reverence*; nor as a rigid, tyrannical being, whom we cannot *love*.—And, finally, our religion, built on such principles,

SERM. ciples, will be *wise* and *rational*; and

V. there can be no foundation for any of those *superstitious* and *enthusiastic* mixtures, which expose the most excellent and useful thing in the world to *contempt* and *ridicule*.





S E R M O N VI.

Of the abuses of free-thinking.

GALAT. V. 13.

*For, brethren, ye have been called
unto liberty, only use not liberty
for an occasion to the flesh.---*

THERE is not a more valu-
able blessing in human life,
than *liberty*. *Civil liberty* is
the basis of all social hap-
piness; and *liberty of conscience* the only
foundation of a rational religion. When
this latter is restrain'd, we are treated ra-
ther like *brutes* than men, *i. e.* creatures

SERM.
VI.

SERM. endued with moral powers, and account-

VI. able for their actions : And therefore

— 'tis one of the chief excellencies of the Christian religion, and very far from the air and spirit of an *imposture*, that it preserves the rights of conscience sacred and inviolable. But, because the world is apt to run into *extremes*, the writers of the New Testament, like persons who had a thorough knowledge of human nature, have taken care in this respect, as well as in all others, to guard against *excess* and *irregularity*. Thus St. Paul, in the text, advises the *Galatians* not to mistake *licentiousness* for Christian liberty ; or, in other words, not to imagine, that because they were freed from the expensive and burthensom observances of the *Mosaic* institution, which are elegantly described as a state of *servitude*, they were discharg'd, likewise, from moral obligations, which are an eternal and immutable law to all rational beings. I intend to consider the subject in a different light, suited to the complection and genius of the *present age* ; and shall en-
quire

quire into some of the chief abuses of SERM.
free-thinking, by which it happens, that VI.
what is really the peculiar *honour*, and
greatest advantage of our intelligent na-
ture, becomes a *reproach* to it, and is at-
tended with most *injurious* consequences.
And,

1st. EMBRACING the principle of liber-
ty has ended, with many, in *infidelity*, or
a disbelief of all religion. 'Tis most evi-
dent, that infidelity never more abounded
than in this age of *free enquiry*; and
that those who are most loose in their
sentiments with respect to the obliga-
tions of religion in general, and of
Christianity in particular, are, in pro-
fession at least, enemies to *bigotry* and
implicit faith: Nay, it may be allowed
farther, that 'tis likely they would never
have gone such a length as to throw off
all religion, if they had continued in a
blind attachment to the principles of
their education, and to established and po-
pular opinions.——Whence now can
this arise?——We who believe that re-
ligion, in all the parts of it, is strictly

SERM. rational, can never allow that it is the na-

VI. tural consequence of a *free* and *impartial* examination of it; but must suppose, on the contrary, that the more thoroughly 'tis consider'd, and the more nicely weigh'd in the ballance of true and unbiaſſed reason, it will be the more heartily believed and submitted to: And I doubt not but I ſhall be able to make it appear, that this melancholy event may be ſufficiently accounted for from other cauſes; and that it not only may, but oftentimes does proceed, not from a *ſuperior underſtanding*, or more *adequate* and *enlarged views* of things, but from *ignorance*, *ſuperficial enquiry*, and even from that *prejudice*, and *implicit faith*, which the monopolizers of reason and free-thinking ſo loudly diſclaim. I would not be thought, by any thing I am now advancing, to diſcourage the moſt rational and free examination of all religious principles, be they ever ſo *ſacred*, and *venerable*, and tranſmitted down with ever ſo much *awe* and *ſolemnity* by our forefathers; nor would I be thought to aſſert,

assert, that any man is obliged to receive SERM.
a revelation, which, upon mature deli- VI.
beration, appears to be unworthy of God,

and repugnant to the reason and nature of things: For my only design is to point out some false principles which are all *an abuse* of the true principle of liberty; and by which, 'tis highly probable, many of the *profess'd admirers*, and *zealous espousers* of it, have been led to a disregard both of *revealed* and *natural* religion. And,

1st. It frequently happens, that after men have *rejected* some principles, which, before, they looked upon as very important, nay essential parts of Christianity, upon being convinc'd that they have as little foundation in the Christian revelation, as in the reason of things, they still retain others, equally repugnant both to reason and scripture. In some time they are persuaded, either by conversation, reading, or their own inward reflections, that these likewise are *absurd* and *irrational*; but instead of *enquiring*, as becomes honest searchers after truth, *take it for granted*, all the while, that they

SERM. are real doctrines of Christianity: The

VI. consequence of which is, that the Christian religion itself is rejected as false, because such doctrines, which are erroneously reckoned as parts of it, cannot be true. Thus, for instance, a man reasons that God can't be an arbitrary being, who has no regard to the moral fitness of things; or an ill-natur'd being, who, purely for the ostentation of his uncontrollable power and sovereignty, has absolutely determined the final misery and ruin of great numbers of his reasonable creatures; that no miracles can prove such doctrines to be from God, because they are a dishonour to his moral perfections; and, consequently, no religion that teaches and inculcates them, whatever its external attestations are, can be of divine authority: But they pass, *among many*, for important principles of the Christian religion, and therefore Christianity is an *imposture*.

—— But why? May not Christians *misrepresent* the doctrines of the religion which they profess?—— Or is it fit that

that any religion should be condemned before 'tis examined, merely from *hearsay*?—Is this *freedom of thought*, and *rational enquiry*?—Far from it. 'Tis *rank prejudice*, under the cover of that amiable name; and a prejudice which, if it was suffered to prevail in all cases, would render it impossible for men to form a right judgment of things, and leave no way, by which to distinguish between *true* and *false religions*: For at this rate, there is nothing so extravagant but may be charg'd upon the *best* and most *unexceptionable* scheme in the world, as easily as upon the *worst*; and it will not be in the power of God to make a revelation to his intelligent creatures, that may not be rejected, tho' it be ever so *excellent* in itself, and brings with it the *highest* and *noblest* credentials.

AGAIN, when men, upon a rational and free enquiry, have found *some* of the principles in which they were educated, and in whose favour they had been a long time prepossessed, to be false; instead
of

SERM.
VI.

SERM. of resting here, they draw this most un-

VI. *just and unnatural inference, that the whole of religion is deceit and imposture.* Because they are convinced that *some doctrines*, which they had formerly an high opinion of, are absurd and irrational, therefore *all revelation* must be disgraced and vilified: And if they have any instances of the *corruptions of Priests*, and of their design to enslave mankind, in order to advance their secular dominion, and serve their ambition and worldly interest, by the ignorance and credulity of the common people, tho' at the expence of the eternal and immutable obligations of morality and virtue (of which, to the *reproach* of our holy religion, examples have been but too frequent) presently Christianity itself is nothing but *Priest-craft*; the invention of *designing* men to keep the world *in awe*, and by an artful management of their consciences, to *pick their pockets*, and *plunder their estates*. Thus they rush *at once* to a conclusion, without having any premises that will support it; and draw consequences from

from things that have no *relation* to, or SERM.
connection with each other; and yet, all VI.
this while, set up for *close reasoners*, and
free enquirers!——Never, surely, was
the name of *rational liberty* so grossly a-
bused! For such a conduct as this, this
way of believing upon no foundation at
all, and concluding that because one thing
is false, another, which is absolutely di-
stinct from it, is so likewise, argues a
very *shallow* judgment, great *confusion* of
thought, and strong *prejudice*.

ANOTHER abuse of the principle of li-
berty is this, that some men seem to
think, that because they have a right
to reject all pretended principles of re-
ligion, which are contrary to reason, to
the perfections of the supreme being,
and the eternal laws of piety and vir-
tue, they may, likewise, throw off the
belief of every thing that they can't ful-
ly account for; and are no more oblig'd,
for example, to believe a providence,
because the visible course of things is per-
plex'd and intricate, full of disorder and
seeming injustice, and not such, as they
ima-

SERM. imagine it would be, if the universe
 VI. was govern'd by an absolutely wise and
 good being; than they are to receive
 such doctrines as assert that God is a rigorous; severe and inexorable sovereign, one that delights in the misery of his creatures, &c. and destroy the necessary and unalterable distinction between moral good and evil. This, I say, is another too *common abuse* of the principle of liberty, leading to a disbelief even of the first principles of natural religion; an abuse that argues great *narrowness* of mind, and is what persons of any *compass* and *freedom* of thought can't be guilty of.

THEY are only *little understandings* that are inclin'd to be *prophane* and *atheistical*, from their ignorance of particular events in the course of providence; whilst those of a more *refined genius*, and the *nicest observation*, always abound in such reflections as these. "We can't describe the thousandth part of the beauty, and much less of the usefulness, of the *minute*st work of the great Creator,

Of the abuses of free-thinking. 137

ator, and shall we pretend to arraign SERM.
and censure the *whole course* of his VI.
providential government? As far as
we *understand* of nature, all the parts
of it appear to be contrived and form-
ed to the utmost advantage; every
thing has its proper use, and nothing
is superfluous or defective. And as
far as we *understand* of providence, all
its operations are in admirable wif-
dom, and with the most kind and be-
nevolent design. And is not this a
reasonable presumption, that what ap-
pears *confused* and *intricate* to us is
perfectly harmonious and beautiful,
wise, just, and good? This is certain-
ly the most *natural conclusion* we can
make, if we consider the narrow com-
pass of the human understanding, and
the *scantiness* of its most extended
knowledge; that we can't compre-
hend the *whole* scheme of God's go-
vernment, and, consequently, may ea-
sily err in judging of *particular* pro-
vidences; and that there must, of ne-
cessity, be some things, in the trans-
actions

SERM. "actions of an *infinite* mind, unfathom-

VI. "able by *finite* reason." These will be
 the reflections of a judicious enquirer,
 who has any knowledge of *himself*, and
 of *nature*. And all such, on the other
 hand, are but vain *pretenders* to rational
 freedom, who presume to measure *all*
things by the standard of their imperfect
 reason, and will admit nothing to be
 true, if they can't solve *every difficulty*
 that attends it; not even that God go-
 verns the world, if he does it in a way
 above their *conceptions*, i. e. in other
 words, in a way, in which ignorant and
 fallible men could not, *themselves*, direct
 and manage the affairs of it. Such per-
 sons, I say, are but vain *pretenders* to
 free enquiry, which necessarily supposes,
 as the foundation of it, a *modest* temper
 of mind, conscious of its own weak-
 ness and imperfection; and as it prompts
 us to examine all things, that are within
 the *sphere* of our knowledge, with care
 and impartiality, to reject as false what-
 ever is contrary to plain and certain prin-
 ciples of reason, and embrace nothing as
 true,

true, but upon proper evidence; so it SERM.
always restrains from passing a judgment, VI.
or determining concerning the truth or
falshood of things, about which we have
no ideas, and which are beyond the *reach*
of our present faculties. For all judg-
ments and decisions of this kind, which
are *above* our understandings, and conse-
quently can have no rational foundation
to support them, are not only the height
of *enthusiasm*, but the utmost pitch of
vanity and *arrogance*.

SOME, again, seem to mistake *liberty*
for a right to *dispute every thing*, and
cavil at all religious principles, which are
commonly received, merely to shew that
they are *free-thinkers*. The great delight
of these people, who are often to be
met with, is to puzzle a controversy, and
start objections against some point or o-
ther of revealed religion; not from a
desire of having them *considered* and *solv-*
ed; but, either to shew their *parts*, or
for the sake of embarrassing and di-
stressing weak minds, who having, per-
haps, neither capacity, nor leisure for

SERM. close thinking, can't see through the so-

VI. phistry of their pretended arguments:
 Such persons are, generally speaking; the farthest that can be from *freedom* and *largeness* of mind: For either they will not stay to hear their objections confuted, which is the least that can be expected from a *candid* and *ingenuous* spirit; or, if they are gravelled and confounded, make a shift to forget it soon, and repeat the same empty cavils over again, to the next company they meet, with as much unconcernedness and assurance as if they had never received any answer to them. Whether these men are, really, in *sentiment* against religion, or whether they dispute only for their *diversion*, or from a *talkative* humour, or an odd affectation of an *uncommon* spirit of liberty, I will not take upon me to determine. However this be, they can't take it amiss if they are ranked on the side of *infidelity*, because they are always talking against religion, but never defending it.

Indeed

Of the abuses of free-thinking.

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INDEED every one has an undoubted SERM.
right to debate, in his mind, upon all VI.
principles before he receives them, whether they are true or false; and no wise man will take up any opinion *implicitly*, how powerfully soever it may be recommended by *great names*, and *worldly advantages*. But disputing only for the sake of *cavilling* is not an *honest* and *ingenuous* frame of mind, but *humour*, *pride* and *singularity*. And, yet, every one that knows the world must see, that this practice very much abounds, especially amongst those, who, for want of judgment, have carried their *free-thinking* to such an unreasonable height, as, because they have found some notions, which they once thought parts of Christianity, to be false, to believe there there is no principle in it true.

LET me add, that when men are become thus loose in their regards to reveal'd religion, their *vanity* may put them upon striking out *new schemes*, in order to render themselves *considerable*.

SERM. THERE is a strong itch in mankind

VI. after *fame*, especially to be thought eminent for qualities that are *highly esteemed*, as arguments of a *great* and *generous* mind: And this may easily be supposed to be the spring of some mens opposition to the principles of revelation, because they are ever full of it; and solicitous only to urge difficulties, and not at all to offer what may be said in its vindication. They think, perhaps, by this means, to pass for persons whose understandings are enlarged from vulgar prejudices, and who, in their pursuits after knowledge, are under no bias; not influenced by custom, human authority, established and popular opinions, nor by any consideration but the abstract reason and truth of things. And when they have raised plausible objections, and urged them for some time, tho' at first, perhaps, they had no design to hurt Christianity by them, yet their thoughts being continually turned against it, and never employed in its defence, they may come at last to think that their objections

objections have some weight; and, by degrees, to imagine that they are more and more important; and, in the end, that they are of sufficient strength to overthrow the Christian religion, and prove it an imposture.——And thus what was, at first, only *vanity*, may, by degrees, be confirmed and settled *infidelity*.——And, to forward this melancholy effect, several other circumstances may concur. The *opposition* such persons frequently meet with will make them more eager in opposing, more tenacious of what they have advanced, and inclined to maintain it: It will put them upon *strengthening* their objections as much as possible; upon finding out *new salvos* to remove the difficulties that lie in their way; and more subtle *quirks* and *evasions*, whereby to render the positive evidences of the truth of Christianity weak and inconclusive.——Till what they asserted and urged, for a long time, only for *cavilling* sake, or from *the spirit of contradiction* that is too natural to eager disputants, they think

SERM. themselves obliged *in honour* to stand by,
 VI. as their own *genuine* sentiments.

I SHALL conclude this head with observing, that there are many who profess a great value and zeal for free and impartial enquiry into religious opinions, and perhaps know something, in *general*, of the reasonableness and excellency of it, and yet have but a confused notion of the *principle itself*, and understand very little either of its *true nature*, or *extent*; and others, who admire it merely because 'tis espoused by those, whom they esteem as the more *ingenious* and *sensible* part of mankind. Both these, therefore, are likely to follow, *implicitly*, such whom they regard as the greatest *patrons* and *defenders* of liberty: And, consequently, if in the circle of their acquaintance, it happens to be the character of an enlarged and generous spirit, not only to take nothing upon trust, but to question and dispute the truth of every thing that is generally looked upon as a sacred principle of religion; they are in danger of mistaking *Scepticism*

cism and cavilling for rational and im- SERM.
partial freedom of thought. For hav- VI.

ing no fixed sentiments of their own, there is no way left them but to follow the example of the most *noted free-thinkers*, to believe just *as much* as they do, and *no more*;—and this, whether it be *any thing*, or *nothing*, is liberty.—Thus may *liberty* be made to stand for *bigotry* and *implicit faith*;——an impartial examination into the nature and evidences of religion may signify *having no religion at all*; —— and men may assume the character of being open to conviction, and free honest searchers after truth, who are *indolent* and *make no enquiry*.

2. Another abuse of the principle of liberty is this, that it has led many, who have not proceeded so far as a *downright disbelief* of all religion, to pay no regard, or at most but a slight and trifling regard, to *instrumental* and *positive* duties. Impartial enquirers into things have discovered the folly and mischievous consequences of *superstition*,

SERM. and *enthusiasm*; that *reading, bearing,*
 VI. *praying, &c.* can answer no valuable
 purposes, farther than as they influence
 men to govern their passions, and be-
 have with justice and universal bene-
 volence to their fellow creatures; and
 that placing the whole of religion in
inward impulses, a warm and lively ima-
gination, and beats and raptures of devo-
tion, has been of vast disservice to the
 cause of solid and useful virtue. And,
 undoubtedly, so far our rational and free
 enquiries have been of great use to us,
 by teaching us wherein the substance of
 true religion consists, and guarding against
 dangerous errors.

BUT from hence it has been inferred,
 that the *instrumental* duties of piety are
 not only *unnecessary, but hurtful*; and
 that an inward veneration and esteem
 of the Deity, improved by frequent and
 serious meditation, is sufficient, without
 any outward stated acts of worship, and
 all that is fit for us to perform, or our
 Maker to expect.—But how does this
 follow?—Is it a just conclusion, that
 because

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because *superstition* and *enthusiasm* are SERM.
mischievous things, therefore a *rational* VI.
devotion, that is allowed to have no
goodness in it but as 'tis subservient to
moral purposes, can't be helpful to us
in the pursuit of virtue? By no means.
There is not the least *colour* of rea-
son in it, nor can there be a more
forced and *unnatural* inference: For *sta-*
ted and *solemn* addresses to God have
a direct tendency to fix, in our minds,
an habitual reverence of his perfections,
a strong sense of our necessary depen-
dence upon him, and continual obliga-
tions to him. And these ends are likely
to be more effectually served by our
making *immediate applications* to the su-
preme being (in which we have the
awe of his omniscience a witness to our
most secret thoughts, and of his almighty
power that can dreadfully punish dis-
simulation and falsehood, to restrain us
from carelessness and levity) than by our
loose, occasional, and cursory reflections.
There is, moreover, this undeniable ad-
vantage arising from *public* and *social*
worship,

SERM. worship, that it preserves in the world
 VI. a general sense of a Deity, and a providence, and of the grand obligations of religion.

AGAIN, our reason, upon an impartial enquiry into the nature of things, will inform us, that *moral* duties are infinitely preferable to those of a *positive* and *ritual* nature; because the former are essentially good, and of eternal, immutable authority in all ages, and under every dispensation of religion; whereas the latter are required with this view, that they may be subservient to these, and, consequently, are only so far valuable as they answer this their ultimate end; and may be changed and varied as circumstances alter, and according to the particular genius and necessities of different ages and nations.

BUT can it be concluded from hence, which seems to be the too prevailing humour of this free, inquisitive age, that *positive* duties deserve *no* regard from us? — Are they to be entirely neglected, because *moral* precepts are of prior obligation,

ligation, and superior excellence? To SERM.
say this, is, in effect, to assert that one VI.
thing can't be *good* because another is better; and because that other is *more*

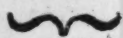
• *useful*, this can be of *no service* at all.
In truth, besides that 'tis an *eternal* rule
of right, that God should be obey'd in
every discovery of his will, whether it
relates to things of a *positive*, or *moral*
nature; besides this, I say, the *positive*
duties of our holy religion have a natu-
ral aptitude to strengthen and enforce
moral obligations, and, for that reason,
ought to be highly valued by us. So
that the notion of the *absolute insignifi-*
cancy of instrumental and instituted re-
ligion is as much an extreme, as the
making the *chief part* of virtue and true
goodness to consist in it; and both pro-
ceed, in a great measure, from the same
principle, *viz. a slight judgment*, and
superficial enquiry. And the *ill effects* of
this notion are too visible. For those
who have neglected all *external* religion,
have been so far from improving, as
might reasonably be expected, since they
profess

SERM. profess to have nothing else to mind,
 VI. that, except in a few instances, they rather decline in their zeal for the practice of that *moral* virtue, which they are so forward to magnify to the *utter disparagement* of every thing else; they have, I say, rather declin'd in their zeal for the practice even of *moral* virtue, in proportion as they have grown cold and remiss with respect to the *solemn worship* of their Maker, and the *instrumental* duties of piety.

3dly. FREEDOM of thought, and impartial enquiry into the principles of religion, have been *abused* and *perverted*, in the present age, by degenerating into a *light, trifling* frame of mind, and a humour of treating sacred things with *ridicule*. With people who affect this way, liberty is nothing else but a *free, bold* manner of treating all subjects *ludicrously*, and turning them into a jest. They have a great inclination to shew their *wit*, especially upon points that afford the *least room* for it; for this discovers an *uncommon* genius: And, there-

therefore, because religion is the *gravest* SERM.
thing in the world, they resolve to be VI.
merry with it; and think it a most *me-*
ritorious action to laugh at what the ge-
nerality of the world esteem and reve-
rence, and endeavour to put all the *wise*
and *virtuous* part of mankind out of coun-
tenance. But such *empty triflers* ought
to know, that there can be no true wit
which has not *reason* for the foundation
of it; that ridiculing what is in itself
good, useful, and venerable, fixes a certain
reproach upon him that attempts it, ei-
ther upon his *understanding* or his *morals*;
that jesting with things of the highest
consequence is *folly* and *madness*; that
'tis an easy matter, by *misrepresenting*, to
make any thing appear ridiculous; and
consequently, that this talent is so far
from being a demonstration that the per-
son who possesses it is a *wit*, as 'tis from
being an evidence of *his good breeding*,
that, in violation of all the rules of *de-*
cency, he banters and treats with *scurri-*
lity the established religion of his coun-
try, and that which all around him have
a high

SERM. a high value for. But I hasten to a
VI. conclusion.



FROM what has been said we learn, that there are no things in themselves so excellent, but what are capable of being *abus'd*; and be their natural consequences ever so friendly and beneficial to mankind, may be made to produce the most mischievous effects. This possibility of the corruption of what is most wise and good necessarily results from the principle of liberty which God hath planted in human nature, which, at the same time that it supposes, that 'tis in a man's power to *improve* his faculties, and the advantages he enjoys, must suppose, that 'tis in his power, likewise, so to *darken* his judgment by wilful *negligence*, and want of *consideration*, and giving an unbounded scope to *sensual* and *irregular* passions, as to confound the very plain and unalterable distinction that there is, in the nature of things, between truth and falsehood, and between moral good and evil. And as this great and melancholy abuse is no just objection

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tion to the *wisdom* and *goodness* of the SERM.
Creator, so neither is it any argument VI.
against the *excellency* and *usefulness* of
the things themselves; any more than
'tis an argument against the *necessary sup-*
ports of life, that they are frequently
abused to excess and intemperance; or
against *reason itself*, that 'tis sometimes
employed to undermine the foundations
of religion and virtue, to give false and
plausible colours to vice and immora-
lity, and in contriving such schemes of
injustice, fraud, and tyranny, as are sub-
versive of the peace and happiness of
the world. Indeed, strictly speaking,
perverting the nature of things, in every
instance, is nothing else but *an abuse of*
reason; and therefore, if it concludes
any thing, it must be against that *no-*
ble faculty, which is our chief dignity,
and only superiority to the animal cre-
ation. And we are to consider farther,
that the *real nature* of things is not, in
the least, altered by our erroneous senti-
ments or irregular behaviour; and that,
if we would form a right judgment in

SERM. any case, we must carefully distinguish
 VI. between the *natural tendency* of a principle, and the evils it may *occasionally* produce, through the ignorance, prejudice, and wilful perverseness of mankind.

THUS, for instance, 'tis generally allowed, that *religion* is not, in itself, ever the less *amiable* or *useful*, for having been so horribly corrupted and deformed, as to make it questionable, whether, under some of the worst *depravations* of it, it has not been quite as bad as no religion at all. The matter of fact is uncontestable. It has been placed in *faith* and *outward profession*, in *idle, ridiculous ceremonies*, *absurd* and *unintelligible* doctrines, in a *slavish submission* to the dictates of cunning and designing men, and even in such a *blind, raging, and injurious* zeal, as has prompted bigots and enthusiasts, of all parties, to violate the great laws of justice and charity, which are of eternal and necessary obligation. Thus, instead of being represented as a *reasonable service*, it has
 been

been taught, in effect, that we must SERM.
become *brutes*, and renounce our *under-* VI.
standings, in order to be religious; and
that we must throw off humanity, all
regard to the immutable differences of
things, and the moral perfections of our
maker, in order to serve him *accept-*
ably.

IN like manner, tho' the exercise of
free enquiry in matters of religion has
been grossly and shamefully abused, we
ought not, upon this account, to enter-
tain the *worse* opinion of the principle it-
self, because it is, indeed, the chief glo-
ry of our nature, and the very end for
which we were endued with reason. For
if the great Creator had designed that we
should submit *implicitly* to established o-
pinions, without examining and judging
for ourselves, reason must not only be
impertinent and *useless*, but an *absurdity*
and a *contradiction*; since if we make
any use of this faculty, and follow its
most plain and natural directions, we
can't suffer ourselves to be *thus impos-*
ed on. Again, freedom of thought, and

SERM. an honest impartial examination into
 VI. the nature and evidence of religious principles, is absolutely essential to a *rational* faith: For there can no more be true faith without *evidence*, than there can without *ideas*; or in other words, men deserve no more to be commended for believing an *intelligible* proposition they know not *why*, than they do for believing what they know *nothing at all* of; from whence it follows, that this liberty of judging for themselves is one of the most *sacred* and *unalienable* rights of mankind. To this we may add, that the exercise of it, in the *utmost latitude* of rational enquiry, without any corrupt prejudice to bias and mislead the understanding, any undue reverence of human authority, or attachment to party schemes, and indeed being influenced by nothing but plain reason and scripture, is the *only way* in which *truth* can revive; whereas without it, men must *necessarily* continue in their *errors* and *vices*, and there will not be so much as a *possibility* of a reformation. According,

cordingly, in proportion as it has pre-
vail'd, it has been of vast service to the
cause of Christianity, by representing its
doctrines in a more *consistent* view, and
establishing its authority upon the *strongest*
and most *unexceptionable* evidence. And
withal 'tis a principle the most *honourable*
that can be to our holy religion, describ-
ing it as recommending to men, with an
openness and frankness *peculiar to truth*,
the use and improvement of their ratio-
nal faculties; and not only *inviting to*,
but *encouraging* the utmost freedom of
debate; because, it has a good founda-
tion to support it, it can stand the test of
sober and impartial reason, and receive no
real injury by all the skill and sophistry
of its opposers. But what a *disagreeable*
and *unworthy* notion does it give of Chri-
stianity, to represent it as raising its tri-
umphs upon the *ruins* of our rational na-
ture, and placing the substance of religion
in *enthusiasm* and *implicit faith*; and, con-
sequently, as setting itself upon a level
with *impostures* and *false religions*, which
will not bear the light, and therefore al-

SERM.

VI.

SERM. ways shelter themselves under the covert
 VI. of ignorance and darkness.

~~~~~  
 SINCE then this principle is the *supreme prerogative* of our intelligent being, essential to all *rational* religion, and, in a peculiar manner, honourable and advantageous to the *Christian*; let us, notwithstanding *accidental abuses* (to which the best things are liable) constantly assert and vindicate it. And let us be sure ever to remember, that tho' we are *called to liberty*, both these rules have the same foundation in *reason*, and are of equal authority in the *Christian revelation*, *Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free; but use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh.*



## S E R M O N VII.

Of Mysteries.

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DEUTER. XXIX. 29.

*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are reveal'd belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*



IN the beginning of this chap-SERM.  
ter, *Moses* exhorts the *Israe-* VII.  
*lies* to be faithful to God,  
and constant in their obedi-  
ence to his law, as the way to engage



SERM. the protection of providence, and make  
VII. them a prosperous and flourishing people.

He, afterwards, denounces very severe judgments against them, if they revolted from the service of the true God, and imitated the corruption and wickedness of idolatrous nations; judgments in which the divine power and vengeance would be remarkably visible; so *exemplary and terrible*, that *all nations* should enquire into the cause of them,

Ver. 24. and say, *Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger?* To which it might be answered, that the reason why they were punished in so *signal* a manner was, that their iniquities were exceedingly aggravated; that they had sinned against a clear revelation of the will of God, and renounced their allegiance and duty to him, notwithstanding they were favoured with extraordinary and peculiar privileges: *They have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the*

the land of Egypt. For they went and SERM.  
served other Gods, and worshipped them; VII.  
Gods whom they knew not.—And the anger  
of the LORD was kindled against this  
land, to bring upon it all the curses that  
are written in this book. And the Lord  
rooted them out of their land in anger,  
and in wrath, and in great indignation,  
and cast them into another land, as it is  
this day. But because it might be ask'd Ver. 15.  
farther, why he interpos'd to bring such —26.  
grievous calamity and destruction upon  
them while he spared other very corrupt,  
idolatrous, and wicked nations, 'tis ad-  
ded in the words of the text, that we are  
not able, in innumerable cases, to fix  
the precise reasons of the divine conduct,  
and therefore should not perplex and be-  
wilder ourselves with fruitless enquiries  
of this kind; *The secret things belong*  
*unto the LORD our God, &c.*

A VERY learned commentator supposes, M. Le  
that there might be another question Clerc.  
started (besides that mentioned in the  
24th verse) of which we have no par-  
ticular account, viz. Whether the *Israe-*  
*lites* would ever, in fact, become thus

SERM. degenerate, and bring themselves, by  
 VII. their guilt, into such deplorable and  
 dreadful circumstances; and that *Moses*,  
 in the text, checks this *idle inquisitive*  
 humour, which makes men anxious a-  
 bout futurity, and to be acquainted with  
 events that don't concern them. But  
 these things are not of much importance;  
 for if we should not be able to fix to what  
 it immediately refers, the text has, in  
 general, an easy and obvious sense, and  
 naturally suggests several useful things to  
 be the subject of the ensuing discourse.  
 As,

- I. That 'tis a *vain* and *foolish* *curio-*  
*sity* to enquire into things that we  
 can't comprehend, and with respect  
 to which we have no light to direct  
 us, either from reason or revela-  
 tion.
- II. That there are, *properly* speaking,  
*no mysteries* in religion. *The secret*  
*things belong unto the LORD our*  
*God*, and only *things reveal'd*, things  
 that are plain and intelligible, *be-*  
*long to us*.

III. That



III. That the great end of revelation SERM.  
is *practice*, the practice of solid and VII.  
substantial virtue; *that we may do all*  
*the words of this law.* From whence  
it necessarily follows,

IV. That no doctrines, which, in the  
least, encourage *immorality*, can be  
parts of a divine revelation. And  
in the

*Fifth* and last place, that the *importance*  
of the several doctrines of revelation  
is to be judged of by this rule, *viz.*  
their tendency to promote and esta-  
blish a becoming regard to *purity*  
and *true goodness*.

I. 'Tis a *vain* and *foolish curiosity* to  
enquire into things that we can't com-  
prehend, and with respect to which we  
have no light to direct us, either from  
reason, or revelation. Of this kind are  
the *secret counsels* and *decrees* of God,  
and *future events* in which we have no  
manner of concern. There are many  
truths that are necessarily hid from us,  
and wrapp'd up in close *impenetrable*  
darkness. Such is the narrowness and  
limitation

SERM. limitation of our present faculties, that  
 VII. we are ignorant of the end and uses of  
 { innumerable things in the *constitution* of  
*nature*; and particular events in the *conduct* of *providence* confound and puzzle  
 us, because we have but very loose and  
 imperfect conceptions of its whole design.  
 And yet the *pride* of man would grasp at  
 every thing. It sets itself to judge, or rather  
 to make childish and groundless *con-*  
*jectures* where it knows nothing; takes  
 it amiss that the All-wise Creator has not  
 condescended to reveal to it all his *secrets*;  
 and can't persuade itself to use and im-  
 prove the knowledge it *has*, for the un-  
 easiness it feels, and its impatient and  
 eager desire after what it *has not*. Such  
 a temper as this is very *perverse* and *un-*  
*reasonable*. For 'tis certainly the *true wis-*  
*dom* of mankind (as there are bounds  
 set to the human understanding, beyond  
 which it cannot pass) to pursue those  
 truths which are within the reach of  
 their faculties, and digest and cultivate  
 that useful knowledge which is of the  
 highest importance to them; and to be  
 thankful that their rational powers are of  
 so

so large a compass and extent; and most SERM.  
*unaccountable folly* to delight to grope in VII.  
the dark; to leave the plain dictates of  
reason, and follow the wild roving of  
imagination and fancy; to attempt to  
argue where they have no principles to  
proceed upon, and unravel inexplicable  
mysteries; and to repine at not being om-  
niscient, or able to comprehend all the  
designs of an infinite mind.

OUR blessed Saviour discourag'd this  
idle, trifling curiosity upon all occasions,  
and very wisely; because it naturally  
leads to *scepticism* and *cavilling*, and  
diverts the minds from a pursuit of solid  
wisdom, to *amusing* and *useless* specula-  
tions. Thus when one (who was only  
concern'd in the solution of that grand  
question, what HE should *do to be sav'd*)  
came and enquir'd of him, *Lord, are there*  
*few that be sav'd?* instead of giving a  
direct answer, which would have hu-  
moured this spirit of *impertinence*, he  
instructed the multitude what was their  
proper business, and most important in-  
terest: *Strive to enter in at the strait*  
*gate, for many will seek to enter in, and*  
*shall*

Luke viii.  
23, 24.



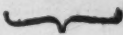
SERM. *shall not be able.* Other instances might be  
VII. alledged to the same purpose, but this  
is sufficient to show, that, in the judgment of this divine teacher, such enquiries were vain and unprofitable, and argued a *light unsteady* temper, and a mind intent upon *trifles*, instead of being desirous of that useful knowledge which is suited to its faculties, and has an immediate influence upon its happiness. Let it therefore be our chief care to make a right improvement of what we do know of the plain directions of our reason, and the extraordinary light that is afforded us by divine revelation; and let us not aspire after things out of our reach, and so neglect the substance, and hunt after shadows. Let us upon the evidences we have, which are very numerous and uncontestable, and of the utmost force with every considerate mind; let us, I say, upon the evidences we have of the unerring wisdom, inflexible justice, and most perfect goodness of the great Author and Governor of the universe, acquiesce, without murmuring, in all his disposals, and entertain an honourable opinion of all the methods

methods of his providence: In this our SERM.  
 reason will *assist* us; so far the inference VII.  
 is *easy* and *natural*. But in attempting   
 to account for every thing, and trace out  
 the whole scheme of God's providential  
 operations, we assume a task that is far  
 above our *capacities*, and *disquiet* ourselves  
*in vain*. We may *imagine*, and *guess*, and  
 indulge a thousand little groundless *fancies*,  
 but shall find it impracticable, in number-  
 less cases, to form *just* and *certain* con-  
 clusions.

THE 2d observation from the text is,  
 that there are, properly speaking, *no my-*  
*steries* in religion. *The secret*, i. e. the  
 mysterious *things*, belong unto the *LORD*  
*our God*; and only *things reveal'd*, things  
 that are plain and intelligible, belong to *us*.  
 A *mystery*, in the scripture sense of it, is  
 a thing that natural reason could not dis-  
 cover, and, consequently, which must  
 have been unknown, if God had not re-  
 veal'd it: And of this kind, I own, there  
 are several doctrines in the Christian reli-  
 gion; before the revelation was given  
 they were mysteries; but cease to be my-  
 steries now, they are reveal'd. According-  
 ly

SERM. ly Christ says to his disciples, that unto  
 VII. them it was *given* to know the mystery  
 of the kingdom of God. Again, St. Paul  
 Mark iv. speaks of the revelation of the mystery  
 11. which was kept secret since the world be-  
 Rom. xvi. gan; and to the Corinthians, Behold I  
 25. shew you a mystery. All which passages evi-  
 1 Cor. xv. 51. dently imply, that how dark soever these  
 things were before, they are now plain  
 and intelligible, how else could they be  
*shewn, reveal'd and known?* And this  
 will appear more undeniably, if we con-  
 sider the things themselves. For what  
 can be more clear than the two *mysteries*  
 St. Paul speaks of, *viz.* preaching the  
 gospel to the *Gentiles*; and this propo-  
 sition, *We shall not all sleep, or die, but*  
*we shall all,* i. e. those who are found  
 alive at the coming of Christ, *be chang'd.*  
 They could not have been known if they  
 had not been reveal'd, and, consequently,  
 before that time were *proper mysteries*;  
 but, in themselves, are *plain truths* ad-  
 apted to all understandings, and have  
 not the least *obscurity* or *intricacy* in them.  
 The same may be said of the *parable* of  
 the *sower*, which our Saviour refers to;



it was *a mystery of the kingdom of God*, SERM. while it was conceal'd and hid under a VII. dark parable; but afterwards so clear, that  no man of common reflection could find any difficulty in it.

Now from this account 'tis most certain, that *mysteries*, i. e. things which reason cannot discover, and which are not reveal'd, are, in the language of the text, *the secret things that belong to God*, and what we have nothing at all to do with; or, in other words, tho' certain things are parts of our religion that *were* mysteries, 'tis not our duty to believe or practise any thing that is *still* a mystery. To believe doctrines that are *still* mysterious is to believe without *ideas*, to believe what we know nothing of; but this, in the nature of the thing, is *impossible*. We may, indeed, believe that there is *some general truth* contain'd in propositions which we don't understand, and so far our faith may be rational, because we know what we believe; but of the propositions themselves we can believe nothing *particularly* because we understand nothing: Nor can greater dishonour be done to the infinite wisdom

SERM. wisdom of God, than by supposing, that  
 VII. he has made it a part of our religious  
 obligations, only to believe, in general,  
 that there is some truth disguis'd under  
 unintelligible terms, to which we have  
 no ideas. For this is making no *revela-*  
*tion* at all, but leaving things in absolute  
*darkness*; 'tis only shewing men their own  
 ignorance, and perhaps may be look'd  
 upon as upbraiding and insulting them  
 with it, but affords no light by which  
 they may be directed to their duty and  
 happiness.

AND if we examine the doctrines of the  
 Christian religion, we shall find in fact,  
 that they are plain and easy truths, and  
 that as we cannot in *reason*, we are not  
 oblig'd by *revelation*, to carry our faith  
 one jot beyond our understanding.——

“ That God made, and supports, and  
 “ governs the world, that he is eter-  
 “ nal, independent, unchangeable, per-  
 “ fectly wise, just and good;” which are  
 fundamental truths of natural religion,  
 explain'd and enforc'd by Christianity;  
 “ that he sent his son into the world to  
 “ be the Instructor and Saviour of man-  
 “ kind,

“ kind ; that he has made him *Lord of* SERM.  
 “ *all*, and *will*, by him, *judge the world* VII.  
 “ *in righteousness* ; that all men shall be  
 “ rais’d at the great day with immortal  
 “ and uncorruptible bodies ; the righte-  
 “ ous be rewarded with *eternal life*, and  
 “ the wicked punished with *everlasting*  
 “ *destruction* ;” these, likewise, which  
 are the peculiar principles of the gospel,  
 have nothing *abstruse* and *mysterious* in  
 them, but are exprest in the most *natu-*  
*ral* and *obvious* terms. If you say, that  
 you can’t account for the *manner* of God’s  
 creating the world, or for the *manner*  
 in which he exists every where, of the  
 general resurrection, and the like, I an-  
 swer, ’tis no part of your *religion* to ac-  
 count for it. — Where the mystery *be-*  
*gins*, religion *ends*. — For I would ask,  
 does the most warm and forward *enthu-*  
*siast* pretend to believe more than that  
 these things are true ? Does he believe  
 any thing at all with respect to the *man-*  
*ner* of them ? Nay, is not his urging that  
 ’tis mysterious and incomprehensible a de-  
 monstration, that he, *himself*, knows, he  
 VOL. I. M can



SERM. can believe nothing *particularly* about it?

VII. 'Tis yet more strange to talk of *mysterious precepts*, than of unintelligible doctrines; for laws that are not *understood*, 'tis most certain, can never be obey'd. What is design'd for a rule of action should be as plain as possible, and if it be intended for an universal rule, it must be adapted to the lowest capacities of mankind; and the enjoining *incomprehensible*, is the very same absurdity, and the same degree of injustice, as enjoining *impracticable* duties. Should it be ask'd, whether God may not command things, which we can't assign particular reasons for? I answer, that I very much question whether any of this kind can be produc'd from revelation; but if it could, the *command itself* would be no mystery, for then 'tis impossible it should be observ'd; it would, in truth, be a command to *doing nothing*; but the only mystery would be, *why God gave such a command*, which your religion had no manner of concern with.

'Tis indeed very surprising, that mankind, in all ages, have been so *fond* of mysteries;

mysteries : that the *crafty* and *designing*, SERM.  
 who make a gain of the credulity of the VII.  
 multitude, should use all their art and in-  
 terest to propagate them, is indeed na-  
 tural enough ; but why should the more  
*honest* and *disinterested* part of the people  
 plead so zealously for them ? Whence  
 comes it to pass, that when they choose  
 to see their way plain before them in all  
 other cases, they should affect to be *with-*  
*out light* in matters of religion ? Religi-  
 on is of vastly greater importance than  
 the common affairs of life, and this they  
 readily acknowledge ; and yet they seem  
 to like it the *better*, the *less* they under-  
 stand it. Such a conduct is very unac-  
 countable, because there can, one would  
 think, be no motive to it.——Mysteries  
 yield neither *pleasure* nor *profit*.——For  
 as, with respect to the works of *nature*,  
 all our pleasure arises from the *perception*  
 of beauty, harmony, and usefulness ; and  
 however we may imagine innumerable *se-*  
*cret* beauties which we have not discover-  
 ed, yet 'till they are *known* they afford no  
*real satisfaction*, nor can we reap any  
*advantage* from them ; 'tis just the same

SERM. with respect to *mysteries* in *religion*; we  
 VII. can neither be delighted nor *profited* by  
 them because we don't understand them,  
*i. e.* in other words they are really *nothing at all* to us.—Nay we can't so  
 much as *admire* them; because admiration necessarily supposes, that we have a  
 knowledge of the *grandeur*, or of the  
*worth* and *excellency* of the object. The  
 utmost that can be said therefore is, that  
 we are *confounded* and *puzzled*.—And  
 is there any pleasure in that, or any advantage merely in being in the *dark*, and  
 having *no ideas*?

HOWEVER, if this were all, a man would  
 only prove himself a *weak* (and might at  
 the same time be an *innocent*) enthusiast,  
 by supposing things that are, in truth,  
*nothing* to him, to be important parts of  
 revelation. But when *mysteries* are pro-  
 pagated with zeal, and impos'd on con-  
 science, when for the sake of what is al-  
 low'd to be *incomprehensible*, the plain and  
 indispensable obligations of justice and  
 charity are infring'd and violated (of  
 which the history of the Christian church,  
 in almost every age, affords many flagrant  
 examples)



examples) 'tis then our duty to oppose an SERM.  
error which makes *religion* contemptible, VII.  
and strikes at the foundation of *Christi-*  
*anity*, and, indeed, of all *good morals*.  
And this can't be so effectually done as by  
shewing that there are no mysteries in  
religion, and that of what we don't un-  
derstand, we can't know whether it be  
good for any thing or no ; 'tis in fact use-  
less, and does not deserve our zeal ; nor  
if we did understand it, would that alone  
be sufficient, unless it was a doctrine of  
some importance to the cause of virtue,  
and the happiness of mankind, and con-  
sequently worthy of God. I shall only  
add, that there is a great difference be-  
tween a *mystery*, and a direct *absurdity*  
and *contradiction*, such as *transubstantia-*  
*tion* and *other doctrines* which have been  
screen'd under that more venerable name ;  
for mysteries are only things that we cer-  
tainly know *nothing at all* of, the other  
things that we certainly know to be *false* ;  
—the former we only *don't* understand,  
the latter we see *can't* be understood.  
But I proceed to

SERM. The 3<sup>d</sup> observation, viz. that the great  
 VII. end of revelation is *practice*; the practice of solid and substantial virtue. *Those things which are reveal'd, says Moses, belong to us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.* The design of revelation, I have already shewn, could not be to *confound* the understandings of men with *deep* and *inexplicable* mysteries; for this, instead of giving a revelation to assist and instruct mankind, is only to bewilder them, and lead them into a maze; and it must be absolutely unbecoming the infinite wisdom of God, to be at the expence of miracles, and sending an extraordinary messenger from heaven, merely to *non-plus* and *puzzle* human reason, and make ignorant men *stare*. Again, it can't be thought to be the sole and ultimate view of revelation, to give right speculative notions of the most important principles, or furnish the understanding with just ideas even of *moral* truths; for what does the most excellent kind of knowledge signify if it be not digested, and reduced to its proper use? or how is it at all more  
 valuable

valuable than *harmless error*, and a *pleasing delusion*? Besides, men may be great proficients in the *theory* of religion, may understand it thoroughly, and be able to argue every part of it with an uncommon *acuteness*, and *strength* of judgment, and be not at all the wiser or the better for it; they may, notwithstanding, be very *miserable* in themselves and *injurious* to others: For even *the devils believe and tremble*. But to aim at promoting and encouraging the practice of virtue by a revelation, the practice, I say, of universal, generous and godlike virtue, which is the perfection of human nature, and inseparably connected both with private and public happiness, is a truly *noble* design, worthy the greatest and *best* of characters, even that of the All-wise governor, the supremely beneficent and compassionate father of mankind: And that this is really the great end proposed by the Christian revelation, must be allow'd by all who have examin'd it with any care, and will be seen the more clearly, the more thoroughly it is understood.

THE greatest part of Christianity is only a reinforcement of the religion of nature.

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consisting of *moral* precepts which were doubtless intended to be the rule of our actions, and strengthening the arguments for a virtuous life which *reason* suggests: And if we consider its *peculiar* doctrines, we shall find that they are all calculated, wisely calculated to serve the same most excellent design of establishing moral obligations, and promoting universal purity. This, for instance, is the design of the *death* of Christ, and the *redemption* purchas'd for us by *his blood*; for he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works: — of his *resurrection*, and the hope that is thereby afforded us of a glorious resurrection to life and immortality; for if we

Tit. ii. 14. are risen with Christ, we ought to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; and to

Co'. iii. 1. have our conversation in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashion'd like unto his glorious body. — Again, the natural influence, and, consequently, the ultimate end of the promises of the gospel is, that

Phil. iii. 20, 21. by



by them we may be partakers of a divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust. Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.—And to mention no more, do we believe the doctrine of the universal judgment? When the Lord Jesus shall be reveal'd from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel;—and when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admir'd in all them that believe?—What manner of persons ought we, then, to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Is it not a most natural and forcible conclusion, that seeing we look for such things, we should be diligent that we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless?

AND this, which must be the view of all divine revelations, and which the grand doctrines of Christianity have a peculiar tendency to promote, is besides expressly declar'd to be its chief design. All hopes of happiness, but what are built on purity of heart and a virtuous life, are, according

SERM.

VII.

2 Pet. i. 4.

2 Cor. vii.

1.

2 Thes. i.

7.---10.

2 Pet. iii.

11.

Ver. 14.]

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according to the Christian scheme, vain and delusory, and will certainly end in disappointment and confusion.——Dost thou expect to be saved by thy faith and outward profession? Hear what Christ himself says, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven.* What doth it profit, my brethren, saith St. James, *tho' a man saith he hath faith, and have not works, can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warm'd, and fill'd, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? even so faith if it hath not works, is dead being alone——Or dost thou expect to be rewarded for a strong, warm, and lively zeal: Tho' thou give thy body to be burned, and hast not charity, it profiteth nothing.——Church privileges are a vain security;—Nay, the outward appearance of some uncommon virtue, and even extraordinary gifts will not avail: For tho' I speak with the tongues of men and angels, tho' I have the gift of prophecy, and understand*

Mat. vii.  
21.James ii.  
14---17.1 Cor. xiii.  
3.1 Cor. xiii.  
1, 2.

derstand all Mysteries, and all knowledge, SERM.  
 and tho' I have all faith so that I could VII.  
 remove mountains, and bestow all my goods  
 to feed the poor, and have not charity, I am  
 nothing. Many, says our blessed Saviour,  
 will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord,  
 have we not prophesied in thy name, and Mat. vii.  
 in thy name have cast out devils, and in 22, 23.  
 thy name done many wonderful works?  
 St. Luke adds, we have eaten and drank Luke xiii.  
 in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our 26.  
 streets. And then will I profess unto them,  
 I never knew you, depart from me, ye that  
 work iniquity. With these things exactly  
 agree the general accounts we have of re-  
 ligion in the writings of the New Testa-  
 ment: *The unrighteous shall not inherit the* 1 Cor. vi.  
*kingdom of God.*—*Blessed are they that* 9.  
*do his commandments, that they may have* Rev. xxii.  
*right to the tree of life.*—*Pure religion* 14.  
*and undefiled before God, even the Father,* James 1.  
*is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in* 27.  
*their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted*  
*from the world.*—So that the sum of  
 religion, under the gospel, is the same  
 with what is very elegantly and strongly  
 express'd by the prophet Micah, *He hath* Mic. vi. 8.  
*shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what*  
 I doth



SERM. *doth the Lord require of thee, but to do*  
 VII. *justly, and to love mercy, and to walk hum-*  
 ~~~~~ *bly with thy God?* From this head, viz.  
 that the great end of revelation is *practice*,
 the practice of solid and substantial vir-
 tue, it necessarily follows,

4. THAT no doctrines, which in the least encourage *immorality*, can be parts of a divine revelation.—Doctrines of this kind can't be charg'd on Christianity, which prescribes the noblest system of morals, without making it contradict itself.—Nor, in the nature of the thing, can they belong to any religion that is of divine original, because of the absolute wisdom, and spotless purity of the great governor of the world.—Even miracles themselves can't prove such doctrines to be true, which are *necessarily* false, dishonourable to the moral attributes of God, and inconsistent with the true perfection and happiness of mankind: But this point is so exceeding clear that I need not enlarge on it; and therefore,

IN the last place, if the great end of revelation be to promote a good life, it is an undeniable consequence, that the importance of the several doctrines of it must
 be

be judged of by this rule; viz. their SERM.
tendency to establish a becoming regard to VII.
purity and virtue. And let any man ask
himself seriously what those doctrines are;
whether they are not those *plain prin-*
ciples in which all good Christians are a-
greed; and whether the most *celebrated*
controversies, which have produced so
much confusion and violence in the Chri-
stian world, have not been about such
things, as have very *little*, if *any* connec-
tion with practical religion?—Let him
ask himself of what use are disputes about
personalities, *substances*, the *hypostatical*
union, and other famous points which dis-
tract the minds of the vulgar; and which
the *learned* themselves can't tell how to
explain. The scripture has none of these
dark phrases, but is a *plain intelligible* rule.
Let us therefore study *that* more, and
scholastic explications of it less, which have,
in many places, darkened the text, and
made difficulties where they *found* none.
And let us value our brethren, not for
being of the same side with us in matter
of *doubtful opinion*, and the *subtilities* of
controversial divinity, but for their *piety*,
justice, *charity*, and the fruits of *universal*
righteousness

SERM. *righteousness* that appear in their conver-
 VII. sations. I shall conclude this discourse
 with two passages of scripture. The one
 is from St. Paul's first epistle to Timothy:

1 Tim. vi. *If any man teach otherwise, and consent*
 3. --6. *not to wholesome words, even the words of*
our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine
which is according to godliness, he is proud,
knowing nothing; but doating about que-
stions, and strifes of words, whereof com-
eth envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,
perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds,
and destitute of the truth, supposing that
gain is godliness: From such withdraw
thyself. The other are the words of St.

James i.
 22. -- 25. *James: But be ye doers of the word, and*
not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.
For if any man be a hearer of the word,
and not a doer, he is like unto a man be-
holding his natural face in a glass; for
he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way,
and straitway forgetteth what manner of
man he was. But whoso looketh into the
perfect law of liberty, and continueth
therein, he being not a forgetful hearer,
but a doer of the work, this man shall be
blessed in his deed.



S E R M O N VIII.

Agur's prayer ; or the middle condition of life, generally, the most eligible.

Prov. xxx. Part of the 8th, and the whole 9th Verse.

--Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.



THESE words (as we are in-
form'd in the first verse of the
chapter) were spoken by *Agur*
to *Itbiel* and *Ucal*, who, very
probably, were two of his scholars, that
came

SERM.
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SERM. came to him to be instructed in the
 VIII. principles of true wisdom: He begins with modestly declaring his own insufficiency for so great an undertaking, and recommends as the foundation of all useful knowledge, an *humble* temper of mind, sensible of the natural weakness of human understanding, and the imperfection of its highest improvements; which he argues, verse the 4th, from our ignorance of the works of nature: And therefore, in the two following verses, he advises his pupils to make it their principal study to understand *the will of God*, which is, of all knowledge, the most important, and of the greatest use in human life; and in all their enquiries of this kind, to confine themselves to what God had *revealed*: Then he introduces the words of the text, in the form of an address to God, in answer, perhaps, to some question that they had propos'd to him about the duty of prayer: *Two things have I required of thee: deny me them not, before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches, feed with me food convenient*

nient for me, (i. e. Allow me only to enjoy such a competency, as will enable me to live with decency and advantage to my fellow creatures, in that station in which I am placed) *lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

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IN this passage 'tis plainly intimated, that the *middle* state of life is, generally at least, more safe and eligible than either *want* or *superfluity*: With respect to its being better than *narrow* and *penurious* circumstances, there can be no dispute; but that it should be preferr'd to great *wealth* and *abundance*, will, I am persuaded, appear a very wild and extravagant paradox to the giddy and unthinking, who judge of things at first sight, without inquiring into their nature, or considering their consequences: For is it not a desirable thing, will such say, to be not only placed above poverty, and enjoy the necessaries and conveniencies, but the *delights* also of human life?——to be persons of *figure*, *power*, and *influence*?——and, consequently, capable of serving our

SERM. friends, and relieving the indigent and  
 VIII. miserable, in a more *large* and *extensive*  
 degree?—Can a condition, which may  
 not only be so agreeable, but useful, be  
*mischievous* and *destructive* to mankind?  
 It certainly may; nay, it actually has had  
 this fatal consequence in many cases. And  
 persons who have behaved with honour,  
 and an unblemish'd reputation in *moderate*  
*circumstances*; nay, who have pre-  
 served their virtue, and manifested great  
 presence and strength of mind, under the  
 buffetings of *adverse* fortune; have been  
 captivated and bewitched by the charms  
 of an *affluent prosperity*, and the pleasures  
 it brings along with it, and sunk into an  
 indolent and dissolute life: Which shows  
 us that there is not only *danger*, but *emi-*  
*nent* and *peculiar* danger in it, when it  
 happens to some particular tempers; and,  
 in general, where there is not a lively  
*influence* of *religion* and *virtue*, and *fir-*  
*ness* and *resolution* of mind. But I pro-  
 ceed to consider the words of the text  
 more particularly, in the following me-  
 thod.



- I. I SHALL endeavour to explain and illustrate what it says concerning the danger of a state of great *riches* and *superfluity* on the one hand, and of *want* and *poverty* on the other; from whence it will clearly appear, that the middle condition is in *general*, and, except to some *rare* and *peculiar* tempers, the most convenient and eligible. And,
- II. MAKE some remarks upon this doctrine to prevent *mistakes* that may arise from it, and direct to the right *use* and *improvement* of it.

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1<sup>st</sup>. I AM to explain and illustrate what the text says concerning the danger of a state of great *riches* and *superfluity* on the one hand, and of *want* and *poverty* on the other. I shall take them just in the order in which it represents them to us. And,

1<sup>st</sup>. FOR the danger that attends a state of great *riches* and *superfluity*, which is express'd thus, *lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?* To deny God signifies in scripture, sometimes, to act as if there were no righteous Gover-

SERM. nour and Judge of mankind, to whom  
 VIII. they are accountable, as well as directly  
 to disown his being and providence: But  
 I can't apprehend this to be the meaning  
 of the phrase here, because, in this large  
 view, there is no more danger of deny-  
 ing God to men in *high* and *flourishing*  
 circumstances, than what *every other state*  
 of life affords, which has in it equal  
 temptations to vice and immorality: I  
 shall take it therefore in a stricter sense  
 than this, and yet not in the most con-  
 fined sense of all, and inquire briefly,  
 what peculiar danger there is, arising  
 from *riches* and *plenty*, of "irreligion  
 " and prophaneness, a disregard and con-  
 " tempt of providence, and other crimes  
 " of a like nature, that are committed  
 " more *directly* and *immediately* against  
 " God himself."

AND, in general, the fundamental dan-  
 ger of all lies here, that in the height  
 of prosperity, men are apt to be *careless*  
 and *inconsiderate*. Chearfulness, and a  
 relaxation from severer studies and con-  
 templations, is not only innocent but ne-  
 cessary, in the present mixed and imper-  
 fect

fect state of human nature: But in an affluent prosperity, when every thing about us is gay, and has a smiling aspect, we are too apt to contract an habitual levity of mind, and neglect all *grave* and *serious* reflections. A continued succession of pomp and pleasure fixes our attention, and diverts it from greater and more important concerns. *Wise* men, indeed, who have impartially estimated the true worth of things, look upon riches and honours only as superfluities and outward decorations of life, and not as essential to human happiness; and value themselves upon them no farther, than as they enable them to do greater good to their fellow creatures; but the *foolish* and *unthinking* are made giddy by their prosperity: The natural consequence of which is, that they must be an easy prey to all the peculiar temptations of their wealthy and exalted state; and it will appear, particularly from the following considerations, that they are in great danger of the vices implied in the text. For,

SERM.  
VIII.  
~



SERM. 1<sup>st</sup>. WHEN the mind is thus weakened  
 VIII. and dissolved, and its faculties enervated  
 and broken, when the moderation of  
 men's tempers is destroyed, and they are  
 become thoughtless and inconsiderate,  
 which the *indolence* and *gaiety*, and *various little trifling entertainments* of a  
 prosperous condition have a natural tendency to effect; 'tis no wonder, if they  
 pride themselves in their riches, as their  
 ultimate happiness; and for want of reflecting on the instability of all human  
 affairs, think themselves self-sufficient;  
 and lose that just sense which they ought  
 to have of the sovereignty of their Maker, and their absolute and necessary dependence upon him. 'Tis no wonder at  
 all, if, by being *complimented* and *flattered*,  
 their vanity be raised so high, as to  
 make them regardless of that supreme being, from whom all their abundance, honour,  
 and greatness flows; nor if, having  
 conceived an extraordinary opinion of their  
 own *merit* upon the account of their  
 shining circumstances, they neglect to  
 pay their due homage and worship to the  
 Deity, and live unmindful of his benefits.

This

This is, in effect, to deny not only God's SERM.  
*government of the world*, but his *absolute* VIII.  
*perfection*, and consequently his *being*: ~~~~~

'Tis to deny our *obligations* to him as the author of every thing we enjoy, and his *right* to our services. The language of such a conduct is, *Who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?* And that all this dissingenuity and ingratitude towards the greatest and best of beings is a consequence, that, it may justly be feared, will spring from riches and greatness, when men are *immoderately fond* of them, and, for want of due consideration, grow *presumptuous* and *arrogant*, experience abundantly testifies.

For there are too many to whom a time of affliction is a season of *some sort* of piety, because then their *sufferings* put them in mind of their *sins*, and the hope of deliverance makes them, *to appearance* at least, humble and submissive to their maker; but when things go on smoothly, and answer to the height of their wishes, they seem to think they have no farther *need* of him, and are sufficient for their own happiness, without

SERM. his *interposition*. The distinguishing goodness of God, in their continued plenty and abundance, is unheeded, because it is *constant* and *uninterrupted*.——What a *perverse* creature is man! he wishes not to be *miserable*, and yet forgets the author of his happiness, because he has not allotted him some mixtures of *evil* and *misery* with it!——Or rather since this is not *human nature*, which abhors ingratitude, but a vile and melancholy *depravation* of it; what will not a man do when prosperity has made him *wanton* and *insolent*! But further,

2. 'TIS most evident, that affluent circumstances are attended with great temptations to *luxury*, and the immoderate pursuits of *pleasure*. *Plenty* too naturally begets *excess*: It has the *means* of it in its power, *custom* to countenance it, and generally *ministers of vice* enough at hand to prompt and excite to it. And luxury enfeebles the mind, destroys every thing that is great and generous, and indisposes for all rational exercises and improvements. It naturally heightens and inflames the *sensual* passions, and leads to the

the pursuit of *irregular pleasures*. For SERM. VIII.  
 what can that man have to restrain him  
 from any enjoyment that his inclinations  
 prompt him to, who has *wealth, power,*  
 and *influence* to command them, and the  
 opportunity, perhaps, of gratifying his  
 corrupt appetites in a *private* manner, so  
 as to avoid, in a great measure, that shame  
 and infamy which justly attends it; what,  
 I say, can reasonably be supposed to re-  
 strain such a one from indulging his cor-  
 rupt desires, if he has no regard to *rea-*  
*son, conscience,* and the *authority* of his  
 Maker?

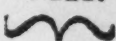
A SENSE of God, indeed, as the inspec-  
 tor and dreadful avenger of his wicked-  
 ness, will create great uneasiness and con-  
 fusion in his mind, and abate his relish  
 of unlawful enjoyments. But can we  
 think, that when he is immersed in sen-  
 sual pleasures, and given up to vicious  
 pursuits, he will suffer his imagination  
 to be continually haunted and scared by  
 such *ungrateful truths*, if it be in his  
 power to prevent it? will he not endea-  
 vour to root out of his mind those *dis-*  
*agreeable ideas*, which are a constant  
 vexa-



SERM. vexation and torment to him? So that

VIII. by his vices he is necessarily prejudic'd in  
 ~~~~~ favour of *atheism*, and from wishing  
 that there was no God, may come, by
 degrees, to imagine that there is none;
 or, at least, which will serve the turn of
 his vitious inclinations and pleasures full
 as well, that he does not exercise a parti-
 cular providence over the *moral* world,
 nor take an account of their conduct.
 And as the pomp and splendour of his
 greatness continually *dazzles* his under-
 standing; as the levity of his mind, and
 the gay amusements his riches furnish him
 with, scarce allow him any opportunity
 for *close* and *serious thinking*; and his high
 spirits bear him up against *sudden* and
occasional reflections; he has, upon these
 accounts, *a better chance* than another
 man of being confirmed in his *atheistical*
 sentiments; and of hindering sober rea-
 sonings about the being and providence
 of God, and a judgment to come, from
fastening upon him; which, if they
 were not some way or other diverted,
 must make the *stoutest* heart tremble in
 the midst of all its carnal delights: I say
 indeed

indeed *a better chance*, because to a man of such a depraved disposition, it appears under that character; but the real truth is, that his affluence and luxury only tend to blind and pervert his judgment the more, and, consequently, to *harden* him in *atheism* and *irreligion*. In the

SERM.
VIII.


THIRD place, If at any time it happens to be the *fashion* to be *atheistical*, and seem to have no sense of religion, the rich and great are, of all others, most likely to fall in with it. For 'tis, generally, their prevailing view to recommend themselves to the approbation of the *polite* world; and therefore we see daily, that in compliance with the *reigning* taste, they run into dresses and customs that are neither *ornamental* nor *useful*, nor perhaps so *decent*, as one might expect from persons of a higher education. And, upon the same principle, if it should happen in the present age, as it probably did in *Agur's* time, that a disregard and contempt of the supreme Being, and bantering and ridiculing things sacred, are reckon'd *genteel* accomplishments; if religion should be looked upon

as

SERM. as calculated only for the *populace*; and
 VIII. it should be thought the character of an
 ~~~~~ *ill bred* man, and one that did not *know*  
*the world*, to be serious in public offices  
 of devotion, or give the least suspicion  
 of secret piety; if this, I say, should be  
 the case, there is great danger that the per-  
 sons above mentioned would fall in with  
 the *modish* extravagance. They would,  
 probably, think it unbecoming their rank  
 and station in life to be out of the *fashion*,  
 even in a thing that is so contrary to *ju-*  
*stice, honour, gratitude, and the true inte-*  
*rest* of mankind: And their temptations  
 to it might be the stronger, as their *pride*  
 makes them condemn the ill opinion of the  
 vulgar, and their circumstances place them  
 above a state of *dependence*.

IF it be said, that a disregard of the  
 Deity, and discarding both natural and  
 revealed religion, prevail very much in  
*middle* life, as well as amongst persons of  
 a more *elevated* condition, I answer, that  
 this will be found to be no prejudice to  
 the present argument; because such, ge-  
 nerally speaking, copy after the example  
 of their *superiours*, and are prophane, from  
 a *servile*

a *servile imitation* of them, in order to SERM.  
be fashionable. And just in proportion VIII.  
as *luxury*, which is, *originally*, a vice of  
the great and wealthy, and can't be prac-  
tis'd with *decency* by persons of inferior  
condition, who have not the same oppor-  
tunities for it, and are not able to sup-  
port it without losing their credit, and  
consuming their substance; just, I say, in  
proportion as *luxury* and the pursuit of  
*pleasure* has abounded, *irreligion*, like-  
wise, has gain'd ground, and spread itself.  
Thus have I shewn the temptations, ari-  
sing from *superfluous wealth* and *greatness*,  
to deny God in the *strict* sense of the  
word, and act with disrespect and ingra-  
titude towards his providence.

SUFFER me now briefly to mention a few  
other vices of the most malignant and fa-  
tal consequences to mankind, to which it  
has *peculiar* temptations. And the

FIRST is *pride* and *vanity*. When men  
are elated by their distinguish'd circum-  
stances, they easily fancy themselves to  
be very *significant* persons, and possess'd  
of *extraordinary* merit: And this vain  
opinion, which is continually fed by their

*merce-*



SERM. *mercenary dependents and flatterers* (a-

VIII. mong whom 'tis scarce possible for any man to preserve a just opinion of himself, and of human nature) discovers itself in every part of their conduct, and in all their appearances. Not but that it may be very innocent and rational for persons of *figure* and *substance* to allow themselves such diversions, and make such an appearance in public, as would be very improper and criminal in those who enjoy but *moderate fortunes*; nor would I be supposed to condemn that external show and magnificence, which is a badge of *civil* honour, and necessary to distinguish the several ranks of men one from another, or maintain the respect due to their different characters. But for any to pride themselves, and fancy that there is a *proper merit* in dress and equipage, or in the prodigality and glittering pomp of greatness, is a vice that argues a very *low* and *degenerate* turn of mind; and whenever such a temper prevails, it will take men off from improving in those moral dispositions and habits, which alone constitute

*true*

Agur's prayer.

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true greatness, and are the only *real excellency* of a reasonable being. SERM. VIII.

FARTHER, riches minister to *ambition*, which is one of the most irregular passions of human nature, and attended with the most mischievous effects: And in proportion to our *vanity*, and the *high views* we entertain for ourselves, they have a tendency to beget in us an unbecoming and insolent *contempt* of others. For men are apt to think, that there is so much respect due to their superior circumstances, as if they were of a *different nature* from their fellow creatures, and originally formed in a *higher order* of being; and thus they sacrifice all the rights of mankind, resulting from their *natural equality*, to an *accidental* advantage, which has no merit at all in it otherwise than as 'tis enjoyed with condescension and benevolence, and a subserviency to the general good.

FINALLY, men are too easily tempted, by their riches and power, to be *imperious* and *tyrannical*, and to abuse those  
great

SERM. great talents, which God hath put into  
 VIII. their hands for the good of others, to oppression and injustice; by which means they most wickedly pervert the wise scheme of providence, and are more *extensively* mischievous and hurtful, in proportion to their *greater capacity* for doing good. I now proceed,

2. To consider what the text says concerning the danger of a state of *want* and *poverty*; or *lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain*. The vices, to which strait and penurious circumstances of life are here represented as having peculiar temptations, are *theft*, and *taking the name of God in vain*, by which is most probably meant *perjury*. And 'tis very evident, that the temptation to these crimes is, in the nature of the thing, much stronger, when persons are embarrassed with difficulties, and oppressed by poverty, than it can be when they enjoy a superfluity of riches, or even a moderate fortune, which is sufficient to procure for them all necessaries, and

and proper conveniencies, and places them SERM.  
VIII.  
above care and anxiety. And as it ap-  
pears likewise, in fact, that the guilty  
this way are most frequently necessitous  
people, who have either no employment  
to follow, or else had rather violate the  
most sacred obligations of conscience, than  
be forced to maintain themselves by ho-  
nest labour; I shall say no more to this  
point directly, but enquire into the causes  
why the poor so easily give way to temp-  
tations of this kind. And,

1. 'Tis undoubtedly owing, in a great  
measure, to the want of *a good education* :  
The advantage of this is unspeakable ;  
and nothing has a larger share in form-  
ing the difference there is between one  
man and another, tho' *originally* of the  
same species of beings: 'Tis this that  
distinguishes the *politer* parts of the  
world from the most *ignorant* and *bar-  
barous* nation : For all mankind have  
the *faculty* of reason implanted in them  
by the great Creator; but if it be not  
*improved*, it will never shew itself to



SERM. advantage: By good culture it may be  
 VIII. raised to a state of great *maturity* and *per-*  
 fection; but if it be neglected, it will be  
 over-run with *ignorance* and *prejudice*.

Again, all men have a *natural power* to discern the difference between good and evil, and the solid grounds and foundations of morality; but, notwithstanding this, if they are not *taught* and *instruct-*  
*ed*, their notions will be very imperfect, rude, and confused: Now there is this defect, generally, in the education of the *poorer sort* of people.—They are trained up in a brutal stupidity.—No care is taken to instil into their minds proper notions of God, and of his providence, of a judgment to come, and the difference between virtue and vice.—And as they grow up thus *wild*, and without any *good* principles at least, if they are not corrupted by bad examples, and have not imbibed a contempt of all religion, 'tis no wonder that they are dissolute and extravagant in their practice: All which shews us the *great use*, I might almost

Agur's prayer.

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SERM.  
VIII.

almost say, *absolute necessity* of a sober and virtuous education, and of infusing sentiments of wisdom and piety into children in their early years, and at the *first dawn* of reason: For their minds are then *tender* and *flexible*, free from *prejudice* and *unruly passion*, and equally susceptible of *good*, as *bad* impressions: And 'tis generally observ'd, that persons retain somewhat of the tincture that was given them in their education, all their lives after.

ANOTHER *reason* why poverty subjects men to the temptations intimated in the text is, that the poor are not trained up regularly to any *employment*, by which they may get an honest livelihood; and for want of being inured to labour and industry, they contract a habit of idleness, than which nothing can be more detrimental to society; for it is, indeed, the *parent* of all vices: To this particularly it may be ascribed, that so many subsist by rapin and violence, and by abusing and plundering their fellow-creatures.

SERM.

VIII.

AGAIN, persons in such low, mean circumstances are often destitute of a sense of *shame*, and regard to *reputation*, and, consequently, have lost one of the surest *guards* of their virtue and integrity, and are easily led into the most abominable and injurious vices: And this is not only owing to their having never received any notions of decency in their education, but to the *wrong custom* of the world. Poverty itself is look'd upon as an object of contempt; and for a poor man to pretend to have any reputation to lose, is too often matter of jest and ridicule: But this is certainly very *impolitic*, as well as unjust; because 'tis for the interest of society to encourage a *sense of honour* in every one that has a reasonable nature, whatever his outward circumstances may be. For it must be considered, that a regard to reputation, and sense of shame frequently prevail, where the awful notions of a Deity, and a providence, and a future state, have little or no influence at all: And therefore,

if

if these are destroy'd, as they generally SERM.  
 are in the wretched poor, by one or o- VIII.  
 ther, or both the methods above mention-  
 ed, and they think they cannot render  
 themselves more despicable by their *wick-*  
*edness*, than they are already on account  
 of their *poverty*; 'tis natural to suppose,  
 that they may commit such crimes, as  
 they would otherwise be *shocked* at the  
 thought of.

AND in this insensibility and indiffe-  
 rence about the good or ill opinion of the  
 world, in this laziness and aversion to la-  
 bour, in this brutish stupidity, and those  
 corrupt and vitious sentiments, which they  
 acquir'd from their education, they are  
 confirmed by their *wicked associates*, per-  
 sons, for the most part, of the same aban-  
 don'd principles with themselves: So that  
 there is scarce a possibility of being reclaim-  
 ed; but, on the other hand, 'tis highly  
 probable they will be more and more en-  
 couraged and hardned in their vices.

LET me just mention *another vice*, that  
 comes under the character of *taking God's*



SERM. *Name* in vain, which the poor are notoriously guilty of; and that is the practice of *common swearing*. To this, I know of no *peculiar* temptation arising from their poverty: And it appears, in fact, that there is none; because it is very near, if not altogether as common among persons of high rank and circumstances, to the very great scandal of religion, and *their own dishonour*. For 'tis a shameful thing that they should indulge to so *vulgar* a vice; a vice, to which there is not the least *temptation*; and which is a *senseless, insignificant expletive* in discourse, that adds neither *strength*, nor *beauty*, to it. And if they will not refrain out of respect to the great God, who is infinitely their superior and better, or from a dread of his vengeance; they ought at least, out of *good manners*, to be ashamed to continue any longer such an *infamous* practice, to the offence of the soberest and wisest of their fellow-creatures, and in defiance of the laws of their country. I proceed now to the

SECOND

SECOND thing propos'd, *viz.* to suggest a few useful reflections on what has been advanced in the foregoing discourse, in order to prevent mistakes that may arise from it, and direct to the right use and improvement of it. And,

SERM.  
VIII.

THE 1<sup>st</sup> observation I would make is, that notwithstanding what has been said, both *riches* and *poverty* are capable of being improved to the most useful purposes: For in affluent circumstances, let a man but govern his appetites, and enjoy his fortune with discretion, and he has the utmost advantages for cultivating his mind; — a freedom from the *cares* of life, and consequently an *easiness* and *cheerfulness* of temper, than which nothing is more serviceable to us in the pursuit of knowledge; — leisure for study; — opportunities for consulting the best books, and conversing with the most learned men in all professions, &c. And, besides, which is much more desirable, he has it in his power to exercise *diffusive* and *Godlike benevolence*; — to be the patron of virtue,

SERM. to encourage it by his example, and support it by his authority and influence, and to be the kind instrument of providence in relieving and comforting his fellow-creatures; and for behaving well in so *critical* a station, and doing so much good to human society, will be entitled to a greater reward. And even a state of *poverty*, if it be borne with becoming patience and submission to the will of God, may be of great use, as it inures us to *laborious* and *self-denying* virtue, to strength and firmness of resolution; and consequently prepares for various services of great importance to mankind, which can't be expected from any whose minds are *relax'd* and *enfeebled* by a long course of indolence and luxury,—who are *unexperienc'd* in difficulties, and therefore *frighted* at the prospect of them.

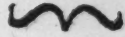
2. As poverty is attended with such disadvantages with respect to the practice of virtue, we should be excited by this consideration to *commiserate* the case of the poor, and relieve them according to  
our

our abilities, that we may remove, at least SERM.  
in some degree, the *temptations* they are VIII.  
under to vice and immorality. But

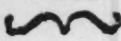
3. THE chief use of all, is to moderate our passion for riches and greatness: Such a station is much more dangerous, when persons are raised to it from a *low* condition, or *moderate* fortune, than to those who have been *bred up* in it: The suddenness of the change, in one case, *shocks* mens tempers, and *oversets* their reason; whereas, in the other, they having been always accustom'd to it, the *impressions* it makes are not so strong and *sensible*. Besides, the desire of superfluity is not a *natural* desire; ----all can't have it indulg'd, and therefore ought not to be set upon it: They should rather consider what 'tis proper for persons in *their circumstances* to expect, and be contented with that; and not aspire impatiently and eagerly after every thing, that the irregular cravings of an *insatiate* appetite may prompt them to. And from what has been said so largely in this discourse, concerning the danger



SERM. ger that attends worldly prosperity, we  
 VIII. may see abundant reason not to *envy* those  
 who are possess'd of it. For what is it  
 we envy?—why, perhaps *ignorance*,  
*vice*, and *misery*, under a glittering and  
 pompous appearance.---The envied cir-  
 cumstances, which are so highly the ob-  
 ject of our admiration and desire, may  
 have corrupted the *virtue* of those whom  
 we think happy in the enjoyment of them,  
 and, in consequence, have destroyed their  
*peace*; so that they may languish amidst  
 all their plenty, and be distracted with  
 innumerable cares; or else may be gay  
 and thoughtless, or given up to riot and  
 luxury. The generality of mankind are  
 such wild and inconsiderate creatures, and  
 examine so little into the nature of things,  
 that a *fine outside* easily deceives them:  
 so that they *love*, and *admire*, and con-  
 sequently *envy*, they know not what:  
 Whereas, if they would weigh matters  
 impartially, their reason must inform them,  
 that, to some tempers, the *ease*, *laziness*,  
 and *affluence* of prosperity will administer  
 num-



numberless temptations to vice and extravagance; and that, on the contrary, afflictions may be of great use, when persons can't be brought to *consideration*, or kept in tolerable *order*, any other way: And in such cases they would be led to think very differently from what they usually do, *i. e.* to look upon the *seeming evil* as *real good*, and on *prosperity* as a *real evil*, notwithstanding its flattering and deceitful appearances. Besides, did they compare their own *entire* case with that of the persons whom they are so apt to envy, they would often find the advantage to be on their own side. For the outward gaiety and splendor of prosperity, if it has corrupted the hearts and manners of its possessors, is a great misfortune, in comparison of *moderate*, nay even of *afflicted* circumstances of life, joined with a grave and considerate mind, regular passions, and a virtuous conduct: Add to this, that prosperity, to those especially who envy it in others, is likely to be attended with the most mischievous and de-

SER M. destructive consequences. For what is the  
VIII. true object of their envy? Is it the *capa-*  
 *city* those persons enjoy of doing *more*  
*good* to their fellow creatures? No! but  
the *abundance, honour, pomp, and luxury,*  
of such a station: And if they are ena-  
mour'd of these things, there is no ground  
to hope that they will guard against any  
*fashionable* excesses, or abridge themselves  
even of the most *unmanly* entertainments  
of a vain and luxurious age.





## S E R M O N IX.

The mischiefs of slavish complaisance, and cowardice.

---

PROV. xxix. 25. former part.

*The fear of man bringeth a snare.--*



IS wisely ordered by the Au-  
thor of our being, that *every*  
*passion* of the soul may not  
only be of great use to us, if  
its natural design and tendency be regularly pursued, but is capable also, by being perverted, of causing much vexation and misery to ourselves, and injury to our fellow creatures: For this is a demonstration,

SERM.

IX.



SERM. tion, founded in nature, and obvious to  
 IX. the meanest capacity, of the necessity of  
 ~~~~~ *self-government*, and that we should take  
 the utmost care to keep all our affections
 and appetites within those bounds, which
 the Creator hath prescribed. Thus, for
 instance, the *desire* of happiness, and *a-*
version to pain and misery, which works
 so strongly in all mankind, is evidently,
 in itself, of the highest advantage; but if
 we form wrong notions of the happiness
 which we ought ultimately to pursue, and
 the evils we should chiefly avoid, it will
 as certainly prove fatal to us. Again, the
 passion of *shame* is an excellent preserva-
 tive from base and dishonourable actions,
 and nothing is a stronger guard and secu-
 rity to our virtue and innocence than this,
 when regularly exercised, and employed
 about proper objects; but a *false shame*,
 which is influenced more by the opinions
 and customs of men, than by the eternal
 differences of things, a *false shame* that
 breaks our spirits, and makes such tame
 cowards of us, that we have not resolu-
 tion enough to stand up for the honour
 of God, and the immutable obligations
 of

of virtue; nor, consequently, to assert and maintain the dignity of our reasonable nature; this, I say, necessarily destroys every thing that is praise-worthy and generous in us, and must betray us into innumerable errors in practice, which are not merely inconsistent with *integrity*, but will render us, to the last degree, *vile* and *contemptible*.

SERM.

IX.

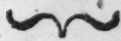
AND the same may be said of *fear*: While it proceeds upon right principles, and is proportioned to the weight and moment of the evils about which it is conversant, it must be calculated to serve the most beneficial purposes, as it warns us where our greatest danger lies, and strongly prompts us to avoid it: But the case is quite otherwise when it forms *imaginary* dangers, and alarms with *false* terrors;—when *fancy* or *corrupt passion*, and not the reason of things, is the foundation and root of it;—when we fear *natural* evils, which, under the direction of an all-wise providence, may be over-ruled for good, more than *moral*, which tend necessarily and invariably to the misery and ruin of the rational creation; and the censures and frowns

SERM. frowns of men, whose wisdom, power, and

IX. duration is *confined* and *limited*, more than

the displeasure and vengeance of the Almighty and eternal God; for then our fears will infallibly turn us aside from our duty, and be attended with most pernicious consequences, as for the sake of avoiding lesser and comparatively trifling evils, we shall run ourselves upon others that are infinitely more dreadful: Which shews us the vast importance of looking well to our *principles* of action, and indeed of making this our first and chief care; because if the prevailing *principles* of our minds are corrupt and vicious, 'tis, in the nature of things, impossible that our *practice* should be virtuous and regular. Evil principles of action, as long as they are entertained and indulged, as necessarily produce a wicked life, as any other causes do their *natural* and *immediate effects*; and therefore till they are corrected and altered, 'tis in vain to expect any reformation in the outward conduct. This is the ground of Solomon's observation in the text, which

I now proceed to consider more particularly, in the following method.

SERM.
IX.


I. I SHALL shew what we must understand by *the fear of man*.

II. IN what sense it *bringeth a snare*.

And,

III. Offer some remedies against it.

I. I AM to explain what we must understand by *the fear of man*. *The fear of man* I take in its largest sense, not only as implying the fear of those positive evils and punishments, which the power and vengeance of man can inflict, but a reverence of human authority and customs, and a dread of the censures and reproaches of our fellow-creatures. But that I may talk distinctly, and without confusion, upon this subject, it may be proper briefly to shew, that this phrase, when it is used, as in the text, in a *criminal sense*, must be understood with some caution and limitation. For,

1st. THERE is, undoubtedly, a reverence due to *human authority* in all points that do not exceed the just bounds of it: and

VOL. I.

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the

SERM. the paying this regard is absolutely necessary to hold the frame of civil societies together, and prevent lawless riot and confusion. In like manner there is a *deference* due to the *innocent customs* and *usages* of the world, and singularity in such instances, in opposition to the unanimous opinion of our fellow-creatures, can be the effect of nothing but *weakness*, or *obstinacy*: Such a conduct is as *ridiculous*, as the complying, in things morally evil, would be *wicked*: 'Tis also utterly inconsistent with a *social* spirit, or with that temper of mind which is absolutely necessary to answer the great end, for which men agreed, at first, to enter into society. For the ends of society cannot be secured but by mutual condescension and respect, and compliance and submission of the *minor* part, in things lawful, and which are entirely of a *civil* nature, to the judgment and practice of the *majority*; and 'tis impossible but peace and good order must be destroyed, if all the members of it are *stiff* and *untractable*.

AGAIN,

AGAIN, as 'tis natural for every one who SERM.
loves himself to desire the favour and IX.
good opinion of his fellow-creatures, and
his duty to cultivate and improve it by all
just and *honourable* methods, because the
quiet and convenience of his life, and his
usefulness too, depends, in a great mea-
sure, on his reputation and character
in the world; he cannot help being *a-*
fraid of censure and reproach, and ought
to be solicitous to avoid (if possible) its
being fixed upon him, or to deliver and
clear himself from it. Provided he stoops
to nothing that is contrary to the prin-
ciples of true honour, and virtue, such a
concern is highly just, and reasonable,
and what no *wise* man can be without.
And, on the contrary, men must be of a
temper quite stupid, and destitute of com-
mon reflection, if they have no fear at
all of *public reproach* and *infamy*, and
must lose, besides, what is in the nature
of things (and therefore what must ap-
pear to be designed as such by the great
author of nature) a very powerful restraint
from *mean, ungenerous, and disgraceful*
practices.

SERM. 3d. THE principle of *self-preservation*

IX. necessarily excites in us a fear of those evils, which we have reason to apprehend from the power or malice of any of our fellow-creatures, and directs to the use of all proper means for our own defence and security. We are so far from being oblig'd to have no care, or solicitude on this head, that we shall be guilty of the utmost rashness and folly, if we expose ourselves to their resentment unnecessarily, and run upon any sufferings, which, with honour and a good conscience, may be avoided. All *innocent*, not excepting the most artful, compliances and evasions must be used, to screen ourselves from evils of this kind; otherwise, instead of being martyrs in a good cause, we only suffer the natural effects of our own wilfulness and obstinacy. And finally, a *dread* of those punishments which the civil magistrate inflicts, for the preservation of mens natural rights, and the security of their persons and properties from unjust violence, and to deter from the commission of such vices as are inconsistent with the public peace and welfare;

fare; this, I say, is not only lawful, because natural inconveniences and evils of all kinds cannot but be the object of our fear and aversion, but necessary; both as the end of these punishments cannot be answered, nor, consequently, civil societies subsist, unless we are struck with terror at the apprehension of them, and because they are, in themselves, fit and reasonable, and no more than what the crime, for which they are executed, strictly deserve. A man indeed, that suffers, by *unjust* human laws, for what is really praise-worthy, may support himself with this reflection, that he suffers for the cause of *truth* and *virtue*, and being conscious of his *integrity*, defy the power and cruelty of his persecutors: but he that can bear to think, without horror, of being *deservedly* branded with public infamy, and cut off as an enemy to society, and the good of mankind, must have extinguish'd his *reason*, and lost all remains of *honour* and *ingenuity*.

THUS far then the fear of man may be defended and justified. In some of the instances which have been mentioned, it

SERM. is, at least, *lawful*, because founded on

IX. principles that human nature cannot throw off; and in others *virtuous*, and *commendable*: But it becomes criminal, when 'tis the *ruling* and *predominant* principle in our minds; because then it either supposes, that we look upon the approbation and favour of men as our supreme good, and upon the frowns, reproaches and terrors of the world as the greatest evil that can befall us; or, at least, (as 'tis always the nature of that which is the prevailing principle, to *over-rule* and *controul* all other principles) it will be too hard for the fear of God, bear down our natural sense of good and evil, and destroy that presence of mind, that constancy and resolution, which is necessary to enable us to behave with honour to our nature, and suitably to our relations in which the all-wise Creator hath placed us, and to overcome the difficulties of a virtuous course. And from this short account of the sinful *fear of man* which the text speaks of, it will easily appear in the

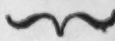
2d. PLACE, in what sense it *bringeth a* SERM.
snare, which I proceed therefore to con- IX.
sider. And not to insist on many little
mean compliances, and *smaller* inconveni-
ences, to which it exposes men; it throws
temptations in their way which are likely
to prevail so far, as to destroy all im-
provements in true wisdom and virtue.
For,

1st. LET us suppose a man, under the
influence of this *slavish* principle, engaged
in searches after truth;—what profi-
ciency is it possible for him to make?
If he has an extravagant veneration for
human authority, nothing must be receiv'd
but what has *that stamp* upon it.—If
he aims at being *popular*, and dreads ill
will and censure, no truths can be admit-
ted but such as are *fashionable*, and have
the current character and reputation of
orthodoxy. The odious names of *Infidel*
and *Heretic* will frighten him from pro-
ceeding in his enquiries, and calling in
question the *common standard*.—Or if
he is awed by the *vengeance* of *civil* pow-
er, and the *terrors* of this world, this
must raise an unconquerable aversion in

SERM. his mind against all truths, that may expose him to *danger* and *suffering*.

IX.

IN order to the making improvements in divine knowledge, 'tis absolutely necessary that the mind be *free, calm, and unruffled*, under no *restraint*, or *terror*; otherwise it will be *reserv'd* and *partial*: There must be no *corrupt passion* to darken the understanding, nor *private interest* to mislead and pervert it. But the man we are speaking of is held in strong fetters; his fears *distract* and *confound* him; he sees difficulties and discouragements on every side, and but one safe path to walk in, even the *old beaten track* chalk'd out by authority, which is the only way to that esteem, applause, and favour, which he so ardently pursues, and to avoid that disgrace, and those sufferings, which are, of all things, most terrible to his imagination.—And being thus *enslav'd*, is it to be expected that he should exercise impartiality and freedom of thought?—Where the light is so *offensive*, is it not highly probable that the eyes of the mind will be shut against it?—'Tis *difficult* even for men who are influenc'd by more
rational

rational and noble principles, and have a SERM.
 virtuous turn of mind, to maintain an IX.
 unbiass'd and steady pursuit of truth, 

when the world *frowns* upon it, and
 loads it with *reproaches* and *persecutions*;
 but to him, who is ready to sacrifice eve-
 ry thing to his reputation and worldly
 interest, it must be absolutely *impossible*.
 Let us suppose, however, that, notwith-
 standing his fears, he may be *impartial*
 in his searches after truth; the case will
 be very much the same, with respect to
 the good resulting from it, as if they en-
 tirely *suppress'd* his enquiries. For,

2dly. THIS principle will infallibly pre-
 vail with him, in times of difficulty and
 danger, either to *conceal*, or *deny* it. 'Tis
 as great an absurdity to expect, that one
 who is dispirited by worldly fears should
 be a *confessor* and *martyr* for true religi-
 on, as that a *coward* should be brave and
 valiant. The *fearful* and *unbelieving*, or,
 at least, the rejecters of true religion,
 when it is oppress'd and persecuted, are
 therefore justly join'd together in scripture,
 because they are in the nature of things
 inseparable: For the prevailing concern
 of

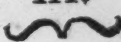
SERM. of such persons is to avoid that which is

IX. the object of their fears, and, consequently, every thing else must give way to it. So that the direct consequence of this destructive principle is insincerity, and the making *shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience*; and if it had sway'd in Christ and his apostles, and the primitive disciples, Christianity could never have been propagated in the world; and should it universally prevail in future ages, mankind must for ever remain in their ignorance and errors, without a possibility of a reformation.

BUT this is not the worst effect of it; for it leads men even to *revile* and *banter* the truth.—Whence, else, do many of the *profane scoffs*, that are thrown out against religion, proceed, but from this source?

——The persons who make use of 'em cannot, generally, be suspected of bantering Christianity, upon being convinc'd that 'tis in itself ridiculous, because they never examin'd it, or consider'd the pretensions on which its authority is founded.——They want either *capacity*, or *inclination*, or *both*, for such an enquiry.

——The

— The thing is attended with *diff-* SERM.
culty, and requires somewhat of *thought*, IX.
 which they are strangers and enemies to, 
 and cannot bear the *fatigue* of. But to
 be a *wit*, and to be *fashionable* in the
 companies they frequent, is a much easier
 thing. 'Tis but getting the laugh against
 revelation, by throwing out a dull *com-*
mon-place jest against it, and the business
 is done. Tho', as an ingenious author*
 observes, a very little *sense*, with a good
 deal of *vice* and *ill nature*, will qualify
 a man for this kind of satire. I shall
 conclude what I have to say concerning
 these *unthinking little critics* with this sin-
 gle remark; that how much soever they
 may magnify their own abilities, and be
 puffed up for being thought persons of re-
 fin'd reason, and uncommon penetration,
 by such as are no wiser than themselves,
 they really act a very foolish part, in a-
 busing and ridiculing things sacred, only
 because they do not *understand* them, and,
 for the sake of a light wanton piece of
 drollery, hazarding the salvation of their
 immortal souls.

BUT

* *Archbishop Tillotson.*

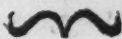
SERM. BUT to proceed. The slavish *fear* of
 IX. *man* will have the same malignant influence upon our morals, as it has been shewn to have, in its direct tendency, upon our *faith*: For when it is risen to such a height, as to over-rule the dictates of natural conscience, and entirely to destroy the strength and constancy of our minds, we are an easy prey to every temptation, and lie open to the most desperate and abandon'd wickedness: Its tendency to an immoral practice appears, in part, from what has been already said, wherein it has been shewn, that in difficult and discouraging times, it leads men to conceal, or deny, the truth, and, consequently, to *dissimulation* and *hypocrisy*; but this being a matter of great importance, deserves to be more particularly and fully illustrated.

LET us suppose, then, a person of this character to live in very corrupt times, when virtue is *unpopular*, and labours under disgrace, and vice is prevailing and *fashionable*: He dreads the reproaches of the *multitude*, and yet these he is sure to meet with if he pursues a virtuous course

course of life; what then can be expected but that he will give himself up to all the extravagancies of the age, and fall in with the *common* degeneracy? The charge of *singularity*, and the *odium* that attends it, will be more than sufficient to counterbalance his weak inclinations towards virtue, and to make him as heartily and universally vicious as the rest of his neighbours; tho' it be, really, our glory to be *singular* in asserting the honour of our Maker, and vindicating the law of our reasonable nature, which is of the most sacred and indispensable obligation, and a cause of the highest importance; and the utmost pitch of madness to debase our excellent faculties, and make ourselves miserable, only because others are so *frantic* as to do the like, and to avoid the imputation of *obstinate* and *unmannerly preciseness*.

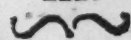
AGAIN, if it be a man's favourite scheme to acquit himself to the *polite* world, and he dreads their contempt as the greatest of all misfortunes; what is the natural consequence? Why, that if these pretenders to politeness are dissolv'd in *effeminacy*, and make *luxury* and

riot

SERM.
IX.


SERM. *riot* the characteristic of a fine gentle-

IX. man, he must immediately resign himself up to the gratification of his appetites, and to all the *modish* vices. And, accordingly, tho' it be indeed shocking and monstrous, and greatly to the disgrace of the present age, there are too many, who, from a *false modesty*, and because they will not be so *rude* as to contradict the general humour of their company, are guilty of extravagancies which they have a secret abhorrence of; and some, 'tis to be fear'd, who, to raise their character for debauchery, and consequently, for an *elegant taste*, boast of vices that they never committed.——Alas, where is the *reason* of mankind, where their becoming sense of the *dignity* of human nature, when they can glory in what is the reproach and shame of it; and endeavour to support the reputation, not merely of being *men*, but the most *refin'd* part of the species, on such actions as sink 'em below the rank of *brute* creatures! For, in truth, as such persons will not think for themselves, they ought to be told, that vice and wickedness of all kinds is the greatest *abuse* and *violence*



that can be offer'd to their rational faculties;—that there cannot be a fine gentleman without *good sense* and a *just discernment* of things, at least, not without *true honour*, which is inseparable from virtue;—that blaspheming the establish'd religion of their country, and those things which all considerate and sober men highly value and reverence, is a very *mean* accomplishment, and what not only a serious *Deist*, but even a downright *Atheist*, who has any knowledge of the world, and any notion of *right* behaviour, may be asham'd of;—and that a *singular aukward dress*, an *impertinent trifling gaiety*, and a *thoughtless unmeaning* conduct, will not atone for a violation of those essential rules of civility and decency. Let me add, that all the vices, into which the evil principle mention'd in the text betrays those who are govern'd by it, argue the utmost baseness of spirit, and consequently both they, and the principle from whence they proceed, are as inconsistent with the character of a *hero*, and a man of *true honour*, as they are with that of a *good christian*.

To

SERM. To conclude this head, if it be our
 IX. ultimate view to secure the countenance
 and favour of persons in *authority*, and
 avoid their displeasure, this likewise will
 subject us to many snares and inconveni-
 ences. The laws indeed of all well
 regulated societies are favourable to vir-
 tue, and pointed at vice and immorality:
 But notwithstanding this, the state of
 things may be, and oftentimes is so cor-
 rupt, that vicious compliances are neces-
 sary to obtain the good-will of our supe-
 riors; and when this is the case, the
 man who is determined, at all adventures,
 to secure their approbation, and avoid
 their frowns, must be easily captivated
 and seduc'd: He must, and probably
 will, be a companion with them in lux-
 ury and prodigality, lie and dissemble,
 flatter their vanity, and be the instrument
 of their ambition, covetousness, and un-
 lawful pleasures. So that, in every view
 of it, the slavish *fear of man* has an evi-
 dent tendency to corrupt our integrity,
 and leads to the most hurtful and destruc-
 tive vices.

BUT it may be said, there is still this
 advantage, that when authority, power,
 and

and interest are on the side of true reli-
gion and virtue, this principle will as
effectually excite to a love and reverence

SERM.
IX.

of *these*, as it will, in contrary circumstances, to *immorality* and *wickedness*. It must be own'd it will to outward appearance. But this desirable state of things is likely to happen but seldom, the generality of the world being too frequently in the wrong, with respect both to their *opinions* and *practices*; or if it should happen, men would entirely lose the *merit* of their affected concern and zeal for virtue and piety, because of motives from which it flows. For nothing can render either our enquires after truth, or the performance of religious duties properly laudable, but their being the matter of our *free choice*, and our acting from such dispositions as have a tendency to the same conduct in *all* circumstances. And that virtue, on the contrary, can be worth but little, which in times of prosperity, and when it is countenanced and upheld by the influence of authority, and by public favour, only *seems* to flourish, and does not spring from its *genuine* principles; but fades and languishes, and entirely dis-

SERM. appears, as soon as 'tis brought to a *trial*.

IX. Having thus consider'd the snares and temptations, fatal to religion and sincerity, which attend *the fear of man*, when it is a predominant and governing passion; I proceed,

IN the third and last place, to offer some remedies against it. And,

1st. LET us maintain and improve in our minds a strong sense of the necessary difference between good and evil. For if we are firmly convinc'd, that there is a fixed and eternal law for the conduct of all rational beings in the nature of things, which cannot be alter'd by *custom* and *opinion*, nor by any *authority* whatsoever, no not by that of God himself, we shall not be easily persuaded to violate the rules of our duty, upon any considerations. Men who think *loosely* may be apt to imagine, that the obligations of virtue are not so strict and indispensable; and perhaps, that God will excuse a deviation from 'em, when they are *forced* to it by reproaches and persecutions: But had they enquired into the true grounds of morality, they would have found that its obligation is immutable, and consequently, that

that where there is a wilful departure from S E R M.
it, nothing can possibly recommend us to IX.
the divine favour. And thus a more
steddy regard to religion would prevail,
and *the fear of man* proportionably
decrease. To this remedy against it, let
us add,

2dly, A becoming sense of the *dignity*
of our nature. This can only be sup-
ported by an inflexible adherence to the
rules of virtue and true goodness; but,
by improving in these, we are capable of
advancing to a *God-like* perfection. And
shall we dishonour and obscure our ra-
tional powers, by enslaving 'em to vice
and wickedness? This thought, made
habitual to our minds, would sustain our
resolution against all the terrors of the
world; this thought, I say, that we have
the honour to be formed after the *image*
of God, and that as long as we maintain
our moral rectitude, we continue to *re-*
semble him; and, especially, that by be-
ing steadfast in our duty, in spite of all op-
positions and discouragements, we imitate
the greatest and most exalted part of his
character, his *constant* and *invariable* good-
ness.

SERM.

IX.

3dly, AGAINST the vice pointed at in the text, the wise man advises as a remedy, in the latter part of the verse, *trust in God: the fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, shall be safe.* For if we firmly believe the wisdom and goodness of his overruling providence, that he orders all things for the best, and with a design to promote the general happiness; and that all the evils we suffer for righteousness sake will be abundantly compensated, and turn, in the end, to our unspeakable advantage; this ought, in reason, to moderate our fears, compose the hurry and disorder of our minds, and reconcile us to all events. And accordingly, we find this serene and pious disposition in the holy *Psalmist*, who expresses himself thus, with an air of security and triumph: *The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? and again, the Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man can do unto me.*

Pf. xxvii. 1.

Pf. cxviii.

FINALLY, as the most *effectual* remedy against the fear of man, let us cultivate a supreme reverence of God. These two
are

are absolutely inconsistent, and cannot SERM.
subsist together: For as the fear of man IX.
destroys our due regard to the divine ma-
jesty, the true fear of God will *limit*, and
reduce within *reasonable* bounds, the
dread of our fellow creatures. Let us,
therefore, by frequent meditation, fix in
our minds a lively idea of his absolute
perfection. Let us contemplate his spot-
less holiness, strict impartial justice, infi-
nite power, and boundless wisdom, in or-
der to excite the highest possible awe and
veneration of him. Let us seriously con-
sider that he is the Author of our being,
and of every thing we enjoy, that we are
necessarily dependent upon him, that our
happiness and misery are entirely in his
power, who has universal nature at his
command, and is the sovereign uncon-
troulable disposer of all events; and, con-
sequently, that his favour is our *life*, and
his displeasure the most dreadful of all
evils. And if we are afraid of the re-
proaches of ignorant, prejudiced and sinful
men, how much more strongly should we
be concerned to prevent his having an ill
opinion of us, who is the greatest and best
of beings, and whose judgment is always

SERM. according to truth, certain and infallible.

IX. To conclude, the wisdom of God is capable of contriving, and his power of executing vengeance infinitely more terrible on impenitent sinners, than any thing they can undergo in the present state; and whereas the scene of all the tyranny and oppression which we can suffer from our fellow-creatures, is confined within the narrow compass of this mortal and uncertain existence, he has *an unchangeable and endless life*, and, consequently, can not only punish in what *degree*, but to what *length of duration* he pleases. Our Saviour's advice, therefore, is certainly very just and

Mat. x. 28. reasonable; *not to fear them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather to fear him, who after having made perverse and irreclaimable offenders miserable, in such a measure, and for so long a period, as the wise ends of his government require, can absolutely destroy both soul and body in hell.*

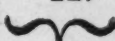


S E R M O N X.

Rules for the profitable reading
the Holy Scriptures.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures.--

AS mankind are endued with SERM.
moral powers, and conse- X.
quently accountable creatures, 
it necessarily follows, that they
had always a law or rule of action *suf-*
ficient to direct their conduct. The *ori-*
ginal and *universal* law was what we
call the law, or religion of nature: This
Q 4 their

SERM. their *reason* was capable of discovering;
 X. and it would have taught them, if they
 had consulted, and carefully attended to it,
 the being and perfections of God, his providential government of the world, the duties they owed to him, and one another, and which related to the right government of their affections and appetites; and, in short, how to behave in the various circumstances and relations of human life. In like manner, it would have furnished proper motives to a regular and virtuous conduct,——from the excellency of virtue in itself;——its necessary tendency to the perfection and happiness of human nature, and the good of society;—and by giving a well grounded hope, in some way or other worthy his infinite wisdom, and concern for the rectitude and order of the moral world, of the special protection and favour of their Creator; and supreme Governour.

BUT notwithstanding this wise provision, by the natural light planted in every man's mind, the world became, in fact, grossly and almost universally depraved;
 ran

ran into deplorable ignorance of God ; in- SERM.
to childish and very dishonourable con- X.
ceptions of his nature and attributes ; in-
to idolatry ; and an absurd, hurtful, and
endless superstition ; and their RELI-
GION corrupted their morals. 'Twas
not because their reason was, *in itself*,
insufficient to direct to better sentiments
of things, but because it was not *im-*
proved and *cultivated*. However, as man-
kind was really thus corrupted, and had
lost, in a great measure, the knowledge
of the true religion of nature, the ex-
pediency and usefulness of a revelation
was not at all the less, merely because
reason, if rightly exercised, was capable
of discovering all the necessary principles
of morality ; nay, indeed, the advantage
of it is altogether as evident, as it would
have been, if men were *unavoidably* igno-
rant of the great truths of religion. For
how they came to be out of the way is
not the question, whether it proceeded
from a defect in their natural powers, or
from want of attention, and not using
these powers as they ought ; in both cases,
'tis certain, they *needed* to be set right a-
gain,

SERM. gain, and recovered to a just sense of their

X. duty, and happiness: And accordingly

God was pleased graciously to interpose, and give a revelation suited to the *circumstances* and *necessities* of an ignorant and degenerate world: But tho' this revelation was an unspeakable privilege *at first*, by putting a stop to superstition and wickedness, and diffusing light and knowledge amongst men; tho' it may *still* be of the utmost use, to the bulk of mankind, as a *standing rule*, by supplying them constantly with proper thoughts, which is what the common people, in all ages, have most wanted, and prescribing a plain, intelligible, and compleat rule of morals; notwithstanding, I say, that a revelation is so desireable a blessing, and may answer such valuable purposes, 'tis certain that men may pervert it, as well as extinguish their reason; and that if it be neglected, and not examined into with care and impartiality, it will be, just as that natural light was, and is at present, in the more ignorant and superstitious parts of the world, *dark* and *useless*: Of which the monstrous corruptions of christianity in *Popish* countries, equal to any

corruptions of natural religion; in the SERM.
most barbarous *Heathen* nations, are a X.
notorious and unanswerable proof. 

'TIS indeed a principle of their faith, that the common people are not to examine into their religion; but take it *implicitly* from the church: And it must be allowed, that this is a necessary principle to establish *antichristian* tyranny over the consciences of men, and support schemes of doctrine which bid defiance to reason, and are inconsistent with the whole design and tenour of revelation: These things will not bear the light, nor stand a free and impartial trial, and therefore are sheltered under the covert of ignorance and darkness. But can any thing be more absurd than such a conduct as this? Does it not derogate, in the highest degree, from the excellency and perfection of the scriptures? is it not a very unworthy and injurious reflection on the wisdom and goodness of God? nay, does it not entirely destroy all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation?

'TWILL be needless to enter into a large proof of these things in any nation where *light* and *liberty* prevails, and persons have
a just

SERM. a just notion of their rights, either as *men*,

X. or as *Christians*. For if God gives any revelation at all, the common sense of mankind determines, that it must, in all essential and important branches of it, be a plain and easy rule; obvious to the capacities of all for whose benefit it is designed. For what is the end of a revelation? Is it not to instruct the ignorant, and consequently to lay down plain principles for directing and regulating their behaviour? Or is it to amuse and confound their minds yet more with *deep subtilties*, with *perplexed* and *intricate* speculations? A revelation that is not intelligible is as much a contradiction, as to say darkness is light. And there is an unanswerable force in the common argument used upon this occasion, *viz.* either that God *could not* reveal himself clearly in those points which are of the greatest consequence to mankind, or that he *would not*: The former of these reflects upon his *wisdom*, the latter on his *goodness*; so that either way, the supposition is unworthy of God, and dishonourable to his perfections; since it represents him as a very *weak*, or else as a *capricious ill-natur'd* being, who intended not to assist,

but

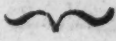
but bewilder his creatures, and lead them SERM.
into a maze of uncertainty and confusion. X.

AGAIN, a revelation that is dangerous to be read, and can't be trusted to the reason and judgment of mankind, that needs to be *illustrated, corrected, or supplied* by a *living infallible oracle*, and *judge of controversies*, is altogether as insignificant as no revelation at all. If men have a *standing rule* to have recourse to, 'tis, at least, possible, that if they seriously consider and search into it, they may frame just notions of things, a rational scheme to act upon: But if they are *blindly* to follow their spiritual guides, and swallow all their doctrines *implicitly*, they are liable to endless impostures; and can have no guard against the most *stupid enthusiasm*, nor even against *irreligion* itself.

FINALLY, a revelation designed for *general* use, which is evidently the case of the Christian, must be chiefly calculated for the bulk of mankind, and adapted to their capacities. The *ingenious and thinking* part have, in every age, been a very few; and the generality, persons of *little reflection*, who must be instructed in the most easy and familiar manner, and taught
their

SERM. their duty with the greatest plainness and
 X. simplicity. To assert therefore that the
 scriptures are obscure, and unintelligible, full of mystery and darkness, renders them quite useless as an *universal* rule; and consequently defeats the very end of their being written, which was *general* instruction: And to deny the reading of them to the *common people* is to deny it to those, for whose benefit they were more directly and immediately intended. This is the manifest reason of the thing.

AGREEABLY hereto, we find the scripture itself is so far from *debarring* the people of this right, that it *insists* upon it, and *encourages* it in the strongest terms. There are no distinctions of persons, some to *lead*, and others *absolutely* to *submit* to their interpretations and decisions; but the exhortations and instructions are *general*. They were not the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, and *Doctors* of the law, but the *common sort* of *Jews* to whom our Saviour said in the text, *search the scriptures*; nay, whom he supposes not only capable of understanding the *plain* doctrines and laws of the Old Testament, but the more *obscure* and *intricate* parts of it,
 the

the prophecies relating to the Messiah; SERM.
search the scriptures, they are they that **X.**
testify of me: And for this the people of 
 Berea are greatly commended, viz. for
 not believing the apostles themselves sim-
 plicity, but *searching the scriptures dai-* Acts xvii.
ly, whether these things were so. This ^{11.}
 practice of theirs is represented as the
 mark of a *noble* and *ingenuous* mind;
 whereas the contrary springs from abject
 and slavish prejudice. In like manner St.
 Paul speaks of *Timothy*, and describes it
 as what had been of great advantage to
 him, *that from a child he had known the* ^{2 Tim. i.}
holy scriptures. And of those same scrip- ^{15.}
 tures he says, *that they were able to make* Ibid.
him wise unto salvation; and again, *all* Ver. 16,
scripture is profitable for doctrine, for re- ^{17.}
proof, for correction, for instruction in
righteousness, that the man of God may
be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all
good works. Now if it was the duty of
 all to search into the *Jewish* scriptures,
 and even into dark prophecies, the com-
 mon people must certainly be proper
 judges of, and consequently obliged to ex-
 amine into, the plain facts, doctrines, and
 moral precepts of Christianity. Nay, it
 can't

SERM. can't be reconcil'd to the wisdom of God,
 X. to suppose, that the *last* and most *perfect*
 revelation of his will is not also the *clear-*
est and *fullest*; or that the same charac-
 ters of being *profitable for doctrine, re-*
proof, correction, and instruction in righte-
ousness, which render it fit to be peru-
 sed and studied by all, do not belong to
 that in a much higher degree, than they
 did to a *preparatory* revelation of *inferior*
 consequence, and more *limited* extent.

AND as the right of all the people to
 search the scriptures is evident, founded
 in reason, and strongly asserted in re-
 velation itself; so are the advantages of
 it.—Reading the Scriptures with serious-
 ness and diligence, is the natural way for
 men to form a *consistent* and *rational*
 scheme of belief and practice, just no-
 tions of God, and of the extent of religi-
 ous and moral obligations: By this means,
 they will have a *strait, easy* rule to go by,
 and build their hopes of happiness upon a
 solid foundation: Whereas the want of it
 has introduced *incomprehensible* and *sense-*
less articles of faith, doctrines prejudicial
 to *morality*, *dark* and *gloomy* notions of

God,

God, and *superstitious* fears destructive of SERM.
the peace and comfort of mens minds.— X.

Reading the scriptures with impartiality, will inspire sincere and honest minds with *humanity* and *benevolence*, with *moderation* and *forbearance* in lesser differences: But the neglect of it occasions hot and angry controversies, blind and violent disputes, and a zeal without *knowledge* or *discretion*.——Again, by this means common Christians will better understand the *grounds* of their faith, and consequently be more firmly established in it: They will be more fully acquainted with the *intrinsic* excellence of the doctrines of Christianity, and the strength and force of its *external* evidence; and so be believers, not upon the foot of *tradition* and *authority*, which confirms all religions equally, but upon rational conviction and choice: They will also find it much more easy to detect the sophistry and false reasoning of its adversaries; whose practice 'tis (and in that they must soon be discovered by such as study the scriptures) to expose and argue against the corruptions and extravagancies of *party-schemes* as true Christianity.

SERM.

X.

BUT the greatest motive of all to a diligent search of the holy Scriptures, is that mentioned in the text, that in them we *believe we have eternal life*: Therein we have an assurance of a happy immortality, as the reward of true piety and virtue, which to reason is very *obscure* and *doubtful* at least, if at all *probable*. Reason may discover something, *in general*, of a future state of rewards, but gives very little ground to expect that they will be *eternal*: This is the *unspeakable gift* of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. As therefore the gospel is the only sure foundation we have of this glorious hope, we should read it frequently for the satisfaction and comfort of our minds, and carefully examine upon what terms we may hope to be entitled to it: This is the most important interest of our being, and should therefore be the chief object of our study. An error here may be of fatal consequence, which renders our utmost diligence necessary. And as these sacred writings contain the rule by which we shall be judged, and have our eternal condition determined, need any thing be added to excite us to search into them
with

with the greatest exactness, as for the SERM.
most excellent and beneficial knowledge; X.

and with the greatest impartiality, that we may not be imposed on in so high and momentous a concern. Indolence or negligence, in this great point, is certainly most unaccountable and unpardonable stupidity. But I must content myself with just mentioning these things, that I may proceed to what I chiefly design'd, and judge to be the most useful part of a discourse on this subject, *viz.* to lay down some rules for the profitable reading the scriptures. By not observing these rules men have lost all the advantages of this study; and besides from hence have risen all those inconveniencies, which have been represented as the natural consequence of allowing the use of them to the common people, and urg'd as arguments against it.

THE first thing that I would recommend is, that we come to the search with honest and unprejudiced minds. In order to the finding out truth in the great points that relate to moral practice, *an acute understanding* is not so necessary as *a sincere upright heart*; and even the *plainness* of the rule itself does not contribute more

SERM. towards it, than *integrity* and *impartiality*

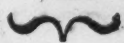
X. *lity* in those who are to be guided by it.

Prejudice will pervert and darken the plainest rule. And therefore if men apply to the study of the Scriptures with minds prepossess'd in favour of any particular scheme; if they take it for granted, before they have examined, that this is the religion of the bible; all they have to do is, in the best manner they can, to *accommodate* Scripture to it. By their being thus pre-determined, all farther light is precluded; passages of Scripture are strained, and tortured, and darkened by *unnatural* comments; because men search the Scripture not to find out the sense of *that*, but to make it speak *their own* sense. But, on the contrary, if their minds are free and disengaged, and they have no concern but for truth, the rule of Scripture is so plain in all essential points, that they can hardly, with an ordinary degree of judgment, mistake it. In the natural course of things, such an honest ingenuous temper, divested of all prejudice, all attachment to favourite opinions, will lead to the knowledge of every necessary truth, and secure from dangerous and hurtful errors;

rors : 'Tis indeed the surest ground-work and foundation of proficiency in divine knowledge ; without which, the greatest abilities will serve but to *confound* and *puzzle* a man the more, as they furnish a thousand little evasions, and help him to give plausible colours to falshood, and consequently will carry him so much the farther from the end proposed.

SERM.

X.



2dly, In all our searches into Scripture, let us keep this rule constantly in view, that revelation is founded on *reason*, and *natural religion* ; and therefore that none of the peculiar doctrines of reveal'd religion can subvert that, or contradict any of its principles. The religion of nature is eternal, immutable truth, of certain and indispensable authority, and, consequently, can't be superseded, or, in the least, altered by external revelation: And if men had always thought of this, they would never have entertained opinions, upon a *pretended scripture warrant*, dishonourable to God, and destructive of the very first principles of morality: They would never, for instance, have looked on any thing as the revealed truth of God, which is inconsistent with his UNI-

SERM. T Y, the fundamental article of all religion; never have magnified faith above virtue; or made true piety consist in outward formality; in an idle, useless superstition; nay, in a violent, injurious zeal, that tramples upon the obligations of justice and charity. They would never, from a few *obscure* passages *rigorously* interpreted, nay, from the *mere sound* of words, have conceived of the Deity as severe and implacable, slow to be appeased, but easy to be affronted; or as an arbitrary sovereign, whose will is his only law; and who, without any regard to their several qualifications, has absolutely determined the happiness of a few of his creatures, and consigned over all the rest, vastly the greater number, to irremediable and endless misery. Had men, I say, formed just notions of natural religion, and considered all its principles as of invariable and necessary truth, they could never have imagined scripture to contain such sentiments as these, which are evidently repugnant to reason; and, especially, to what the light of nature teaches concerning the unlimited goodness of the great Creator, which is so visible in the

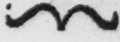
the frame of the universe, and the general SERM.
course of providence. Such *injudicious* in- X.
terpreters of Scripture little consider, how
much they reproach revelation itself by fa-
thering those absurd doctrines upon it, as
well as abuse their own understandings: For
the religion of nature cannot but be *true*;
what then is the consequence of making
any particular revelation oppose and un-
dermine it, but that that revelation is ne-
cessarily *false*?

3dly, In interpreting Scripture always
regard the *general scope* and *design* of it.
Let those who have leisure read whole
books at once, or, at least, to the end of
proper periods, that they may have an en-
tire and connected view of the things con-
tained in them. For it must give us
but confused ideas to break off in the
midst of a narration, or jumble together
parts of different facts; so likewise to read
only select portions out of epistles, and
those, perhaps, injudiciously chosen, when
there is *one design* pursued in the whole,
and a continued *reference* throughout.
Be careful likewise to attend to the *con-*
nection of the writer, and the thread of
his reasoning. For, in all writings, *inde-*

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SERM. *pendent* passages may be urged to serve all
 X. manner of purposes; by which means
 the gravest and most judicious authors may
 be forced to talk *ludicrously*, and *incon-*
sistently; and the best and most useful
 books, which are written with the strict-
 est regard to virtue, be made to counte-
 nance *vice* and *impiety*.

AND, indeed, it has happened, that
 the holy Scriptures, of all other books,
 have been most grossly perverted and abus-
 ed this way. Common writings have, in
 the main, and unless in the heat of con-
 troversy, been treated with fairness and
 candour enough: But the writings of the
 Old and New Testament, by picking out
 of them *little scraps*, and *separate porti-*
ons, (which can't be understood but by
 attending to their connection, nor urged
 as proofs of any thing, in opposition to the
 general view of the revelation, without
 rendering it perfectly unintelligible and
 useless) the sacred writings, I say, by be-
 ing thus *mangled* and *torn to pieces*, have
 been represented as teaching the most ab-
 surd, nay, indeed, very impious and im-
 moral doctrines. The building doctrines
 therefore upon *single texts* may lead us
 into

into great and dangerous mistakes. I might S E R M.
illustrate this by a multitude of examples; X.
but I would not be tedious, and therefore 
shall confine myself to one instance, *viz.*
the words of the prophet *Jeremiah*, *the* Jer. xvii.
heart is deceitful above all things, and de- 9.
sperately wicked, who can know it?

THIS passage, divided from the context,
and considered as a general independent
proposition, has been used to as strange a
purpose as one can well imagine, *viz.* to
prove that men are not acquainted with
THEMSELVES; that tho' *self-consci-*
ousness be inseparable from, and the distin-
guishing excellence and privilege of their
being rational, they are strangers to their
own hearts, know not what their own
views and intentions are, nor what the
prevailing habits and dispositions of their
minds. This hasty conclusion, I say, has
been drawn from these words (which if
it was applied to *civil* affairs, as it is to re-
ligion, must create the utmost confusion)
not only in opposition to the general sense
and experience of mankind, but quite con-
trary to the design of the author himself.
This will evidently appear if we consider
the connection, and the general reasoning
that he is pursuing.

For,

SERM. FOR, in the 5th verse, God is introduced
 X. as denouncing a woe against all those,
 who fix their ultimate dependence on human power and policy. In the 7th and 8th verses is described the wisdom and happiness of trusting in the Lord, and making him our strength. Then follows the text we are considering, which by all rules of good interpretation (since there is not the least mark of the prophet's beginning *a new topic* of discourse) must be referred to the same argument, and contain another strong reason against making man our confidence; *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* i. e. "There
 " may be infinite *devices* and *subtilties* in
 " the hearts of men, which thou can't
 " not understand: While they promise
 " thee fair, and make the warmest protestations of affection and zeal for thy
 " service, their intentions may be the contrary, and their views *private* and *selfish*: Their resolutions are fickle and
 " mutable, and many little circumstances
 " may prevail with them to change their purposes; and so render their promises
 " vain and delusory. Nay, 'tis possible
 " for

“ for them to arrive at such a pitch of SERM.
“ *premeditated* and *desperate* wickedness, X.
“ as to endeavour, even under *friendly*,
“ pretences, to undermine their interest.
“ Place not therefore thy supreme and ul-
“ timate confidence in man, but repose it
“ in the unchangeable God; who, as by
“ reason of the perfect and necessary rec-
“ titude of his nature he can’t deceive
“ thee, so as he is absolute Lord of the
“ universe, and the uncontrollable dis-
“ poser of all events, he must be able
“ with ease to effect every thing, that is ne-
“ cessary for thy security and happiness.”

To the directions above-mention’d a-
bout observing the general design of scrip-
ture, and the connection of particular pas-
sages, which is necessary in interpreting
all writings whatever; let me add, that
’tis proper for us to make some allowances
for the *difference* of languages, and the
peculiar phrases and *idioms* used by the
people for whom the scriptures were *ori-*
ginally and more *immediately* designed.
I shall explain this a little by the words
for ever, and *everlasting*, which are far
from having the same force, in the sacred
writings, as they generally have in our
own

SERM. own language. For 'tis certain that they

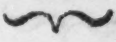
X. do not always signify a *strict* and *absolute* eternity, but very frequently a *limited* duration; and the sense of them is, in a great measure, to be determined by the subjects to which they are applied. Thus every one allows, that when we read of *everlasting mountains*, the word means very differently from what it does when God is said to be *everlasting*. Again, when 'tis said of Christ, that *he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end*, we are to understand no more by it, than that he shall reign to the end of the world; for *then*, we are expressly inform'd by St. Paul, *he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father;—that God may be all in all*. In like manner, when we are told *that Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*, nothing more is meant than a fire that made a full end of them, and was not extinguished, till those cities, with their inhabitants, were utterly consumed. In these passages, and in some others, which seldom regard things of real

Hab. iii.
6.

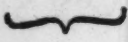
Luke i.
33.

1 Cor. xv.
24, 28.

Jude v. 7.

real importance, we must allow for the SERM.
change of languages, and *different use* of X.
 words; and the common people will, 
 without much difficulty, fall into the true
 interpretation of all passages of this kind,
 if they follow but the natural and easy
 method of comparing one part of scrip-
 ture with another.

4thly, ANOTHER rule of great impor-
 tance is, to explain *dark figurative* passa-
 ges, parables, metaphors, allegories, &c.
 by such as are *plain*, and their sense *un-*
contestable. Those parts of scripture,
 which are express'd in the clearest and
 most simple manner, give a complete and
 rational account of the perfections and
 providence of God, and a noble scheme
 of morality. And explaining *dark* passa-
 ges in a book, which, it is generally be-
 lieved, can contain no contradictions and
 inconsistencies, by such as are *plain* and
indisputable, must be allowed to be the
 most natural method of interpreting it.
 And if the common people take care to
 follow this method, and make any use of
 their reason, they can't be misled, by the
peculiar stile and *phrase* of scripture, into
 unworthy conceptions of God, or mistake

SERM. the general nature of true religion. Whereas,
 X.  as, if they *strain* figures to their utmost height, and put parables and metaphors upon the *rack*, they may, indeed, extort *strange* senses from them, and draw the most *wild* and *extravagant* conclusions.

IN *figurative* ways of speaking there is one grand point intended, which is, generally, obvious to a fair enquirer: If he goes beyond this, and argues strictly and rigorously from every circumstance, what may he not deduce from scripture this way? Thus when the conversion and sanctification of a sinner is stiled the *regeneration*, and *the new creature*, the general design of these expressions is only this, that he entered upon a new kind of life, has thoroughly chang'd his principles and methods of acting; and is, indeed, in the temper of his mind, and prevailing dispositions, *quite another creature*, from what he was before. But is it not most unaccountable, that any should strain this metaphor so prodigiously, as to make mankind mere *machines*, who can do no more towards their reformation from sin to virtue, than a dead body towards restoring itself

itself to life, or a creature towards giving
itself being; and, thereby, render all the
exhortations and commands of the gospel
to repent, and turn from our evil ways,
impertinent and *trifling*? The folly of
this forced and unnatural method of in-
terpreting is clearly seen in other instances,
and universally allow'd; for when 'tis
said, that *the day of the Lord so cometh* 1 Thess.
as a thief in the night, who ever imagin-
v. 2.
ed, upon the bare force of this metaphor,
that it will be attended with injustice and
violence? And the true reason why men
think justly on the *one*, and not on the
other is, that in the one case they pro-
ceeded *impartially*, and, being under no
bias, take the natural and most obvious
sense of scripture; whereas, in the other,
their judgment is already determined in
favour of some *party scheme*, which they
take all opportunities and all advantages
to support.

5^{thly}, I would advise those who want
leisure, opportunity, and, perhaps, capa-
city for *critical* enquiries, to read chiefly
the plain parts of scripture; those, espe-
cially, which describe the perfections and
providence of God, or contain practical
instructions,

266. *Rules for the profitable reading*

SERM. instructions, and gospel motives and encouragements to virtue; and to trouble themselves but little about doubtful passages that are only *incidental*, and have no immediate connection with the *grand design* of the revelation. For if Christianity be rightly understood in its *practical* doctrines, and as it is a *moral* rule, which, without doubt, must be the chief intention of any revelation; other obscurities, about ancient customs, manners, sects, philosophy, &c. nay, about any points merely *speculative*, signify just nothing. For as God would never have given a revelation, if the errors of the world had not been of a *practical* nature, but consisted only in absurd *theories*; so differences about such things may always continue, nay the bulk of the world may know but little about them; and yet all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation, as a standing rule, be completely answered. Those who have time, and proper abilities, may commendably employ their thoughts about these lesser matters; but others, who have neither a genius, nor opportunities for speculation,

act

act wisely in not meddling with it, but SERM.
confining themselves to more important X.
and essential points.

IN the last place, as the great end of revelation must be to promote the practice of virtue, we learn from hence a sure rule, by which to judge of the *importance* of the several doctrines of it: We should lay no stress upon any but as it tends to promote a holy life, and upon all, just in proportion to their tendency to this great and desirable end. And, upon this foot, what will become of most of the *controversies*, that have been so furiously agitated in the Christian world, in which the *best* part of religion is not at all concerned? Learn then to employ your chief zeal about the *weightier matters of the law, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God*; and be but little solicitous about speculative opinions, and matters of *doubtful disputation*. Follow *after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another*:
For then only will you have studied the scriptures to a right purpose, when ye have purified your souls, in obeying the truth thro' the spirit, unto unfeigned love

Micah vi.

8.

Rom. xiv.

19.

James iii.

17.

SERM. of the brethren; and learned to practise

X. *the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

I have nothing farther to add, but to
 Aſs xx. commend you to God, and to the word of
 32. his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.





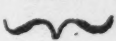
S E R M O N XI.

Of Heresy.

TITUS iii. 10, 11.

A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.



IS surprising to think, what a S E R M. XI.
vast influence the mere sound
of words, *artfully* manag'd, 
has upon the generality of
mankind, both to confound their judg-
ment, and inflame their passions. This
the dealers in controversy seem to be uni-
versally

SERM. verſally aware of, and therefore ſcarce e-

XI. ver fail to have recourſe to it, as the
 ~~~~~  
 ſureſt method of engaging on their ſides  
 the *popular* prejudices, and ruining the  
 credit of their adverſaries. The favourite  
 terms of reproach made uſe of againſt  
 Chriſtianity are *enthuſiaſm*, *ſuperſtition*,  
*prieſt-craft*, which have a prodigious ef-  
 ſect on weak and ſhallow minds, as long  
 as they are apply'd in a *confuſed*, *general*  
 way, without any diſtinct or determinate  
 ideas; they operate like a *charm*, while  
 proper care is taken to keep the people  
 in the dark; but by being juſtly explain'd  
 loſe their *magical* influence entirely, be-  
 cauſe they appear not to be at all appli-  
 cable to the *real* doctrines and duties of  
 the Chriſtian religion, but only to the  
*ſupplements*, *innovations*, and *corruptions*  
 of ignorant and prejudic'd, or of deſign-  
 ing and intereſted men.

AND, among Chriſtians themſelves, the  
 word *heresy*, particularly, for want of be-  
 ing rightly underſtood, has been, in every  
 age, an engine of defamation and vio-  
 lence; by which perſons of differing ſen-  
 timents and intereſts, or of ſtrong paſ-  
 ſions, have vented their rage and animos-  
 ity

## Of Heresy.

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fitly one against another: It has been SERM.  
charg'd *promiscuously* on truth and error; XI.  
and the best characters, both for sound  
knowledge, and integrity, have had the  
hard fate to fall under the imputation of  
it; and, in consequence, have been stig-  
matis'd as reprobates, debarr'd the privi-  
leges of Christian communion, and treat-  
ed with the utmost contempt and barba-  
rity. As this word has been manag'd  
by *hot* and *passionate* tempers, by *ecclesi-*  
*astical politicians*, and *bigotted enthusiasts*,  
it has been the instrument of endless  
schisms and confusions: For heresy has  
been made to signify every thing, be it  
right or wrong, that contradicts the *esta-*  
*blished* opinions of the times, and the  
outcry against it has, generally, been  
loudest in the most *corrupt* and *degene-*  
*rate* state. Nay, private Christians, in  
the course of their religious debates, set-  
ting up their sense of scripture as the  
standard and test of truth, have mutu-  
ally hereticated and denounced their ana-  
themas against each other; by which un-  
just method of proceeding, they have not  
only discourag'd an impartial study of  
the scriptures, and a free enquiry into



SERM. the doctrines of the gospel; but have  
 XI. divided, and consequently weaken'd, the  
 interests of our holy religion, and expos'd it to the scorn and insults of unbelievers.

As therefore the word heresy has been apply'd in so *ridiculous*, and withal so *injurious* a manner, to the dishonour, and great prejudice of the best and most useful scheme of religion that ever appear'd in the world; as the misapplication of it will still continue to produce the same evils; and finally, as the thing itself is of the highest consequence, it being a heinous offence against *Christian sincerity*, tho' it has been almost constantly misunderstood, either thro' ignorance, partiality, or craft, and made to signify mere errors, or only supposed errors in *speculation*, of no importance to the cause of solid virtue, or the happiness of mankind; these being consider'd, I say, it may be useful for us to enquire into the true nature of it: And, for this purpose, I have chosen these words of *St. Paul*, to be the subject of the following discourse, in which he so particularly characterizes an heretic, that we can't miss

miss knowing him, if we attend to his SERM.  
 description, and gives directions to *Titus* XI.  
 in what manner to deal with him: *A*  
*man that is an heretic, &c.* And, in-  
 deed, all the other accounts we have of  
 this matter are so clear and express, and  
 have so little of difficulty or ambiguity  
 in them, that 'tis scarce possible the word  
 should be abus'd in that gross manner it  
 has been, and perverted from its original  
 design, if men had not consulted their  
 own *passions* and *prejudices* more than the  
 Holy Scriptures; and if the signification  
 of it had not been artfully chang'd to  
 serve a *turn*, whereby the ignorant and  
 unwary have been impos'd on in all ages:  
 For as these are too much under *manage-*  
*ment*, and dispos'd to speak as they are  
*taught*, instead of examining for them-  
 selves into the nature and reason of things,  
 'tis no wonder that they call every one  
 an heretic, that is declar'd to be such by  
 their *superiors*, those especially to whom  
 they have resign'd the direction of their  
*consciences*, 'tis no wonder, that they ap-  
 ply to him all the bad characters which  
 they find of heretics in the New Testa-  
 ment, and consequently consider him as

SER M. an *infamous* person, and devoted to *destruction*; or, that having given him such a monstrous and frightful dress, they hunt him down, and pursue him with *insolence* and *cruelty*. This is the natural consequence of implicit faith, and an indiscreet, intemperate zeal. But to proceed more directly to the point before us.

Acts v.  
17.  
Chap. xv.  
5.  
Ch. xxiv.  
5.  
Ch. xxvi.  
5.

HERESY, in the New Testament, is, most commonly, used in an *indifferent* sense, and, but seldom, in a *bad* one. It, generally, signifies no more than a *sect* or *party* in religion. Thus we read of *the sect*, or heresy, of *the* Saducees; of *the sect*, or heresy, of *the* Pharisees; St. Paul is stil'd a *ringleader of the sect*, or heresy, of *the* Nazarenes; and he says of himself, that *after the strictest sect* (where the same *Greek* word is used) of the *Jewish* religion, he lived a *Pharisee*: In this last passage, particularly, nothing can be more plain than that the word has an *innocent meaning*; since the Apostle rather *commends*, than charges himself with any thing *criminal*, for having been a *Pharisee* before his conversion to the Christian faith. And we find it applied in the same manner, *Acts* xxviii. 22. where,

where, upon St. Paul's coming to Rome, we are told, that the *Jews*, who inhabited there, desired to hear his thoughts of Christianity, and what he had to offer in defence of it; for, say they, *as concerning this sect*, or heresy, *we know that every where it is spoken against*. I shall mention but one text more, and that is 1 Cor. xi. 19. *for there must also be heresies among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest*. The evident design of which is, that, considering the various tempers of men, their different views, passions, prejudices, their selfishness, ambition, vanity, and the like, it was natural to expect, that they would divide into parties about religion, as well as about politics, and the civil affairs of life; and that the providence of God wisely permitted this for the trial of their integrity, and to distinguish the indolent, careless, and insincere, from the real friends of truth, persons of an honest, inquisitive, and ingenuous temper.

Now, according to this account, the general notion of an heretic is no more than this, *viz.* one that sets up to be the head, or chooses to join himself to a particular



SERM. particular religious sect: I say, who makes

XI. this the matter of his *choice*, because it is implied in the original signification of the word; and besides, nothing can be supposed to have any concern with religion, but what is a *voluntary* action. An heretic therefore, in a bad sense, must be one, who *knowingly* espouses a false doctrine, is *insincere* in his profession, and asserts and defends what he is *convinced* is contrary to Christianity, and, consequently, one who maintains and supports the interest of a faction, to serve some base designs. This will appear, beyond dispute, when we have considered the text, and compared it with the general tenour of the New Testament.

ACCORDING to St. *Paul's* account in the text, an heretic is not only *subverted*, or turn'd aside from the true faith; he not only entertains wrong sentiments of Christianity; but *sinneth*, i. e. doth this *wilfully*, and with an *ill* intention. Such as have merely an erroneous judgment can't be here meant, because errors of the understanding, consider'd in themselves, are not *criminal*, but naturally arise from the weakness and fallibility of human

## Of Heresy.

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SERM.

XI.

human reason: They are, in most cases, *involuntary*, in many *unavoidable*. And, therefore, as all moral evil depends upon the error and obliquity of the will, the persons, described by the apostle as *sinners*, must be *wilful* corrupters and opposers of the Christian religion; such whose minds are perverted by irregular dispositions and appetites; and who have resolved to sacrifice truth and virtue to the gratification of their sensual desires. And that this is the real case appears farther from hence, that the crime spoken of in the text is of such a nature, as required not *instruction*, but *admonition*; from hence, I say, it evidently follows, that the fault lay in the *will*, and not in the *understanding*. For every one knows, that the only way to rectify a mistaken judgment is by the use of reason and argument, by exposing the false grounds on which it is formed, removing prejudices, and representing matters in a clear and proper light; and that to advise a man, in an authoritative way, and without informing his understanding better, to alter his apprehension and judgment of things, and expect to

make

SERM. make a convert of him merely by telling  
 XI. him he is in the wrong, be it with ever  
 so *solemn, imperious, and magisterial* an air,  
 is to the last degree absurd and ridicu-  
 lous. But he may, very rationally, be ad-  
 monished, or reprov'd, with relation to  
 those errors that depend entirely upon the  
*will*, and are owing to a *free choice*, be-  
 cause, in every such case, he must *know*  
 himself to be out of the way, and has  
 all the necessary means of a reformation  
 in his own power. St. Paul, therefore,  
 expressly mentions this circumstance,  
 which renders that of an heretic a com-  
 pletly bad character, *viz.* that he is  
*condemn'd of himself*, or acts against the  
 sense of his own mind, and the dictates of  
 his reason and conscience. He is one  
 that makes religion a cloak for his im-  
 moralities, and espouses and propagates  
 what he knows to be false; to promote  
 the ends of his ambition, covetousness,  
 or sensual pleasure; who, indeed, thinks  
 it his interest to retain the name of a  
 Christian, and, in that circumstance on-  
 ly, differs from a thorough and wilful  
*apostate* from Christianity, but which in-  
 curs the greater guilt may, perhaps, be  
 hard

hard to determine; for as the one rejects SERM.  
the Christian religion altogether, the other XI.  
out of choice corrupts it, and opposes its  
true doctrines, even while he pretends to  
believe and reverence its authority: Such  
as these, I say, persons of such *vile* and  
*dishonest* principles, and of so *flagitious* a  
character, are the heretics condemned by  
St. Paul; and, therefore, to fix it as a term  
of reproach on any, in whom there does  
not appear *hatred* of the truth, a *sensual*  
mind, and a *profligate* conscience, must  
be unchristian and scandalous.

AND if we examine other passages of the  
New Testament, we shall find that they all  
concur in giving us the same idea of heresy:  
'Tis represented as *a work of the flesh*, be- Gal. v.  
20.  
cause it has its foundation in the corrupt in-  
clinations of human nature. 'Tis reckon'd  
amongst the most heinous and execrable vi-  
ces, such as *adultery, idolatry, hatred, va-* Ibid.  
*riance, seditions, murders*. And heretics are  
constantly describ'd as men of no *probity* or  
*honour*, strangers to all the principles of  
virtue, and embracing such opinions only  
as were calculated for the gratification of ir-  
regular appetites, and advancing *selfish* and  
*worldly* views. Thus St. Paul writes to Ti-  
mothy



SERM. *mothy* concerning *Hymeneus* and *Alexander*,

XI. that, *having put away a good conscience*,  
 1 Tim. i. they had *made shipwreck of faith*. And of  
 19. those *false prophets*, of whom St. Peter

2 Pet. ii.  
 1.

Deut.  
 xxxii. 6.

Ver. 4.

foretold that they should arise, *bringing in damnable heresies*, this character is given, with regard to their prophaneness and impiety towards God, that they would *deny the Lord that bought them*. The person here meant is not, as some apprehend, the Lord Jesus Christ, but God the Father, the supreme Lord and Governour of the world, concerning whom *Moses* put this question to the *Israelites*, *Is he not thy Father who hath bought thee?* because the Greek word, signifying *supreme* master, or ruler, is never once used when Christ is spoken of, but always of the Father; and, besides, in the parallel text of St. *Jude*, the supreme Lord is expressly *distinguished* from the Lord Jesus Christ. His words are, *For there are certain men crept in, unawares, who were before, of old, ordain'd to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ*. The monstrous character of these heretics may be seen throughout this whole

whole chapter of *St. Peter*, and almost to SERM.  
 the end of *St. Jude's* epistle: And the same XI.  
 general representation [is given of them,   
 in all the epistles of *St. Paul*, viz. that  
 they designed not to *serve our Lord Jesus* Rom. xvi.  
*Christ, but their own bellies*; and taught 18.  
*things which they ought not for filthy lu-* Tit. i. 11.  
*cre's sake; speaking lies in hypocrisy, and* 1 Tim. iv.  
*having their conscience seared with an hot* 2.  
*iron.* And tho' they might, sometimes,  
 put on the outward appearance of gentle-  
 ness and humanity, they were still, to use  
 our Saviour's phrase, but *wolves in sheeps-* Mat. vii.  
*cloathing*; and only endeavoured, under 15.  
 that specious pretence, to disguise their co-  
 vetousness, rapine, and cruelty, till they  
 might be more *conveniently* exercis'd. Ha-  
 ving thus largely stated the scripture ac-  
 count of heresy, suffer me to make some  
 observations upon it. And,

1<sup>st</sup>, It appears from what has been said,  
 that no *mere error* of the *judgment* can be  
 heresy: For heresy is a high degree of  
 wickedness; and necessarily supposes irre-  
 gularity of the affections, and a deprav'd  
 and vicious choice: Whereas erroneous  
 conceptions and apprehensions of things  
 are no crime at all, but natural to man-  
 kind

SERM. kind in the present weak and imperfect  
 XI. state of their faculties. Nay, I think,  
 it may be affirmed, not only that no *mere error* of the *judgment* can be heresy; but also that there can be no heresy, where there is, properly speaking, *an error of the judgment*: This may be owing to laziness, prejudice, partial examination, and other very bad causes; but heresy it cannot be, as long as a man *believes* he is in the *right*, however he came to work himself into such a persuasion. For an heretic, in St. Paul's account, is one that *knows* he teaches and propagates a false doctrine; who does it *deliberately*, and against the clear suggestions and dictates of his conscience; either from a principle of vanity, and to make himself considerable as the head and leader of a sect; or to advance his temporal interest.

2dly, WE may infer from the foregoing discourse, that no *honest* man can possibly be an heretic. He may, indeed, have *errors* (and who is there among us that has not) nay, he may err in points of *importance* too, but his mistakes can't be *dangerous* while he takes care to maintain a good conscience. For human nature is, in  
 its



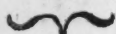
its very make and constitution, weak and fallible; and considering men's different capacities, turn of understanding, education, and the like, *different*, and, consequently, *erroneous* sentiments (for truth can't *vary* from itself, but must always be *consistent* and *uniform*) I say different, and, consequently, erroneous sentiments seem to be unavoidable. And it is not to be doubted, but that the wise and merciful governour of the world will make great allowances for the imperfection of our knowledge, the confusion of our reasonings, and the many little prejudices that, *insensibly*, bias and mislead the mind in this state of immaturity and darkness.

I WOULD ask, particularly, what is the ground of our acceptance with God under the dispensation of the gospel? Is it *absolute perfection*, or *sincerity*? If *perfection* be required of us, an exact and adequate knowledge of all the parts of the Christian revelation, and a strict invariable obedience to the precepts of it; or, in other words, if it be indispensably necessary to our obtaining the divine favour, that we be free from all errors of the *understanding*, and from all defects in our *moral* con-



SERM.

XI.



1 John  
i. 8.

duct; the whole race of mankind must be *reprobated*,—equally and necessarily subject to condemnation. For *if we say that we have no sin*, and, consequently, no erroneous judgments, from whence all irregular practices proceed, *we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*. But if a *sincere* desire to know and do the will of God be the only condition of obtaining the Christian salvation, as it must be, in the present circumstances of mankind, unless our future happiness depends upon an *impossibility*; must not all mistakes, which are consistent with *general sincerity*, be consistent likewise with a state of *favour* with God? And, consequently, if we condemn those for *party differences*, in whose lives there appear all the fruits of a good conscience, and who give the greatest evidence, that can reasonably be desired, of their being honest and impartial, by a steady pursuit of virtue, and an inflexible adherence to it, under the utmost discouragements and difficulties, must not this be a *rash* and *unrighteous* judgment? To proceed one step farther; has not the scripture expressly declared, that *whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God?*  
And

1 John  
v. i.

And shall we then insist on *private ar-* SERM.  
*ticles* of our own, and right notions in *in-* XI.  
*tricate* and *perplexing* controversies; and  
 presumptuously pronounce all who have  
 not the same strength of understanding,  
 and the same opportunities and advantages  
 for improving in knowledge, or perhaps  
 only the same *confidence* with ourselves,  
 to be forsaken of God, and mark'd out  
 for destruction? The resolving these few  
 plain questions will soon shew a consider-  
 ate mind the folly and danger of such hard  
 and unmerciful censures, which are evil,  
 in a high degree, when they are only *rash*  
 and *precipitate*; and much more so, when  
 they proceed from *malice*, and are accom-  
 panied with a *contemptuous* and *scornful*  
 treatment of our brethren; but most of all,  
 when those who are so forward to condemn  
 others for *speculative* errors, are, them-  
 selves, chargeable with *immoral* practices;  
 for this is most impudent and monstrous  
*hypocrisy*. And yet, how strange and un-  
 accountable soever it may seem, such per-  
 sons are frequently the most noisy and vio-  
 lent advocates for orthodoxy; either, per-  
 haps, to *palliate* their vices, and screen them  
 from public view; or else, thinking to

SERM. make some *atonement* for them by a fierce  
 XI. and outrageous zeal for *trifles*. To these  
 the words of our Saviour are immediately  
 directed: *Why beholdest thou the mote that*  
 Matt. vii. *is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the*  
 3, 4, 5. *beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt*  
*thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the*  
*mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is*  
*in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast*  
*out the beam out of thine own eye, and then*  
*shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out*  
*of thy brother's eye.*

THIS framing Christianity according to the model of *private opinions*, and *party peculiarities*, and imposing them on conscience under the penalty of eternal damnation, has been one of the most *successful engines* against its cause and interest; and would, probably, were it not for the superintendency of a watchful and all-powerful providence, have been, long ere this time, the *utter subversion* of our holy religion: And nothing has been the instrument of more confusion in the world, or of greater distress and injury to civil society: I would therefore, was I capable, in order to possess your minds with a *just horror*, represent the prodigious evil of it in the



the strongest and most pathetic terms.—SERM.

Hence it is that religion, among so many, XI.

is degenerated into *form* and *ceremony*, and that a *blind injurious zeal* supplies the place of the power of godliness.—

From hence have arisen so many *absurd, inconsistent, and self-contradictory* schemes of doctrine, which have exposed our religion to contempt.—Hence also has proceeded hypocrisy, and a denying the truth, in conformity to the constitutions of men in power, in order to secure their favour, and avoid the cruel effect of their *religious vengeance*; and, consequently, secret *infidelity* under the mask of an outward profession.—And as for treachery and oppression, inveterate hatreds, bitter revilings, irreconcilable animosities, poverty and slavery, private murders and public massacres, unsettling governments by tumults and insurrections, and almost all other kinds of evil, have they not sprang from *the same root of bitterness*?—Has not the charge of heresy been thought a justification of such vile enormities, as we may defy *irreligion*, or even *atheism itself*, to exceed?—And can any of us



SERM. allow ourselves in a practice which is productive of such infinite disorder and misery, if we have only the common seeds of *humanity* in our nature, much less if we regard the honour of the *Christian religion*?

XI. *3dly*, If heresy be an error of the *will*, and such only can be guilty of it who are *condemn'd of themselves*, how can we certainly know, in most cases at least, whether a man be an heretic or not? Let each of us put this question to himself impartially, and if we can't answer it to our satisfaction, let us, however, learn thus much from our ignorance, to be *modest* in the censures we pass upon others. Indeed, in the first age of Christianity, when the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were communicated, of which one was the gift of *discerning spirits*, this matter might be more easily decided. And *Titus*, particularly, to whom *St. Paul* directs the advice in the text, can't be suppos'd, considering his character and office, to have been without these powers. But what rule have we, now these extraordinary illuminations and assistances are *ceas'd*, by which to conduct ourselves in enquiries of this nature?

1 Cor. xii.  
10.

IF it be said, that such wicked deceiv-  
 ers are, generally, *known by their fruits*,  
 and that their vicious lives will shew us  
 by what views they are actuated, and the  
 vile design of their imposture: I answer,  
 that, even upon this supposition, I should  
 think it better that they be rejected for  
 their *immorality*, which is notorious and  
 palpable, than for *heresy*, of which, per-  
 haps, we can't so certainly judge. But  
 what if they are so cautious as to keep clear  
 of all *open* vices, and affect an air of *sanc-*  
*tity*, in order the more effectually to secure  
 their end; in such cases as these, I say,  
 what can we do, be they ever so wicked  
 in *principle* and *intention*, but leave them  
 to God, the supreme and only judge of  
 conscience? And since 'tis so difficult for  
 us, in most instances, certainly to judge of  
 heresy, why should we be forward to charge  
 it on our brethren, for every *trifling dif-*  
*ference* of their sentiments from ours?  
 And, above all, why should we be so *un-*  
*righteous* as to impute it to men of *honest*  
 principles, and *exemplary* lives, who, as has  
 been shewn, are quite the reverse of the  
 heretics mention'd in the New Testament;  
 and, if St. Paul's authority be of any  
 T 4 weight,

SERM.

XI.

SERM. weight, cannot possibly have incurr'd that  
 XI. guilt?

BUT, after all, the truths which they deny are so clear, and supported by such evidence, as necessarily to approve themselves to every honest and impartial enquirer; and therefore you are positive, that notwithstanding their seeming piety, and strictness of outward morals, there is a *latent* corruption in their hearts, and they are influenced by some evil affection or other, tho' it does not appear *publicly*; either by a love of singularity, pride, ambition, &c. or are under the power of some vicious prejudice. This is constantly said by *bigots* and *enthusiasts*, and especially by such as are themselves most in the wrong, notwithstanding the most solemn and repeated declarations of their opponents to the contrary, and, consequently, as it will *serve* for *either* side of *any* question, can have no effect on sober and considerate minds, but will be look'd upon as the result of *passion* and *partiality*. But besides, why are we so conceited of our own understandings? Are we infallibly sure that we are in the right? Modesty forbids us directly to assert this, tho' all such reasonings



ings necessarily imply it : Or if we were, SERM.  
 would it not be much more excusable to XI.  
 suppose our neighbour's *judgment* weaker  
 than ours, than to reproach his *honesty* ?  
 I shall only add,

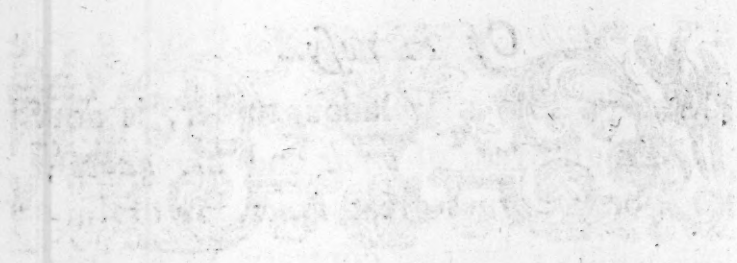
IN the *fourth* and last place, that tho'  
 it be a point of great nicety to judge of  
 heresy in particular instances, the persons  
 who come *nearest* the character of the old  
 heretics are *violent party-men*, who con-  
 fine Christianity to their own faction, and  
 excommunicate all that take the liberty  
 to differ from them ; the *rigid imposers* of  
 human schemes of doctrine, and modes of  
 worship, as *essential* branches of religion,  
 and *laws binding conscience* ; these, I say,  
 are most like the heretics condemn'd in  
 scripture, notwithstanding their insolence  
 and presumption. The common people,  
 indeed, who help to encourage and support  
 this spiritual tyranny, may be *innocent de-  
 luded* enthusiasts ; but the first *contrivers*,  
 and the *conducters* of it, especially when  
 it appears to have a direct tendency to  
 wealth, grandeur, and luxury, may justly  
 be suspected of *base* and *irregular* views ;  
 or, in the language of St. Paul, to be *men  
 of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth*,<sup>1 Tim. vi.</sup>  
 who



SERM. who suppose *that gain is godliness*. A turbulent, factious, and persecuting spirit is one of the *surest marks* of heresy. And when the substance of religion is placed in trifling speculations, which have no manner of connection with virtue and morality, in abstruse incomprehensible mysteries, or in outward shew and ceremony, we may certainly conclude, that if this does not proceed from a very *weak head*, it must spring from a *dishonest heart*.

IN order, therefore, to keep at the *utmost distance* from heresy, let us be modest and charitable in our censures, and not forward to fasten the infamy of it upon others. Let us fix on what party we will, even the *worst* and most *erroneous*, and we shall find the greatest reason to believe, that there are in it many persons of real probity and virtue, notwithstanding the *absurdity* or *dangerous tendency* of their principles: And therefore to condemn whole bodies, in the *gross*, merely for their *distinctive opinions*, without considering that we ourselves may be mistaken, or making proper allowances, with respect to others, for the fallibility of human understanding, for prejudices of education, and the particular disadvantages

advantages they may labour under, is not SERM.  
 only a high strain of *pride* and *arrogance*; XI.  
 it not only argues great *ignorance* of hu-  
 man nature; but is contrary to all the  
 principles of *justice*, *truth*, and *goodness*,  
 which both the natural reason of our  
 minds, and the Christian revelation in-  
 culcate, as of indispensable authority, and  
 infinitely preferable to the most *sound* and  
*orthodox* faith, and the largest extent of  
*speculative* knowledge. For though I un- 1 Cor. xiii.  
 derstand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and 2, 4, 5, 7.  
 though I have all faith, so that I could re-  
 move mountains, and have not charity, I am  
 nothing. Charity vaunteth not itself, is not  
 puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly;  
 —thinketh no evil;—believeth all things,  
 hopeth all things. Now the God of patience Rom. xv.  
 and consolation grant you to be like-minded, 5, 6, 7.  
 one towards another, according to Christ  
 Jesus; that ye may, with one mind, and  
 one mouth, glorify God, even the father of  
 our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive  
 ye one another, as Christ also hath received  
 us, to the glory of God.



*[The following text is extremely faint and illegible, appearing to be a series of lines of handwriting or printed text.]*



## S E R M O N XII.

### Of SCHISM.

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I COR. xii. 25.

*That there should be no Schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another.*

AVING, in my last discourse, SERM. considered and explained the XII. nature of *heresy*, I intend, in this, to treat of *schism*, its almost inseparable companion. It must indeed seem very strange to every one, who is acquainted with the mild and amiable spirit of Christianity, that the pro-



SERM. professors of a religion, which so strictly  
 XII. enjoins gentleness, moderation, and universal charity, should be so forward to divide and crumble into *parties*, and oppose one another with so much *rage* and *violence*: This is quite unnatural as we are *men*, united by the bond of one common nature, one common interest; but much more out of character as we are *Christians*, whose peculiar distinction from professors of all other religions, if we act upon the principles that true Christianity inspires, will be mutual forbearance, harmony, and peace. But yet the matter of fact is uncontestable, and won't admit of any evasion. Selfishness, pride, the desire of dominion, a tyrannical imposing spirit, and sometimes perhaps (for I fear that has been but seldom the case) mere prejudice void of any direct ill design, have occasioned as great and dangerous factions in the *church*, as were ever fomented, by the same bad causes, against the security and peace of *civil government*. The Christian society has been split into infinite *divisions* and *subdivisions*, of separate and inconsistent interests, excommunicating, reviling, and almosts always, when they had

had it in their power, *persecuting* each other; by which the common cause has been exposed and weakened; and Christianity itself, which is most admirably adapted to civilize mankind, to calm and soften boisterous and rugged tempers, and promote universal order and happiness, has been the means of irritating and inflaming their passions, and, by a most strange and melancholy perversion of it, the source of discord, confusion, and misery.

AND what is it that has been the *main subject* of the most bitter, uncharitable, and outrageous contentions? that has rais'd so many *factions* under the name of Christian societies? and not only destroy'd the peace and communion of the church, but, in many cases, broke through all the ties of friendship, natural affection, and common humanity?—Have these evils sprung from a zeal for the eternal and unchangeable obligations of *morality*?—From a concern for *justice, truth, and mercy*, or an emulation to excel in *substantial* and *useful* virtue?—Quite the contrary. Almost all the schisms and disturbances that have happen'd in  
the

SERM.  
XII.

SERM. the Christian world (and *church history*

XII. furnishes us with a pretty large cata-

logue) have been about *mere trifles*, things of very little consequence to true Christianity, and often-times repugnant and dishonourable to it; such as, submission to *ecclesiastical* authority, the belief of *mysteries* of which we have no ideas, and conformity to rites and ceremonies of *human* institution, which serve but to *encumber* and *debase* the rational worship of the Deity, and render it *weak* and *superstitious*. Thus we find, that very soon after the apostolic age, a *little insignificant* and *senseless* controversy, about the day of keeping *Easter*, occasioned a terrible confusion and schism in the Christian church; the *western* churches separating, and renouncing communion with the *eastern*, for several years together. And have not some of the hottest disputes since been about the *secret decrees* of God, and metaphysical subtilties relating to his *essence*, and manner of *subsisting*, about the *validity* or *nullity* of ministerial ordinations, praying with, or without a *form*, *bowings*, *crossings*, *garments*, and other outward modifications of piety, which are  
but



but the *circumstantials*, and very inconsiderable ones, at best, of religion; and can't, in my judgment, be reckon'd *essential*, or even *important* branches of any religion that is fit for mankind to observe, or their Maker to require, without entertaining very *low* thoughts of the wisdom of God, and a most *contemptible* opinion of human nature. And since these divisions among Christians are such a reproach to their character, and have been urg'd as objections against the excellent doctrine they profess, which is the most *benevolent* and *peaceable* that ever appear'd in the world; since they have produc'd, and will always necessarily produce the most mischievous and fatal effects, injurious to true piety and virtue, and to the interest of civil society; and finally, since, in almost every controversy, we find both the contending parties forward to charge the *schism* on each other, as indeed it is too natural, when the passions are strongly engag'd, for both to run *unwarrantable lengths* in the heat of their animosity and opposition; upon these accounts, I say, it must be of equal advantage to us to form right notions of

VOL. I. U schism,



SERM. schism, as of heresy: That, on the one  
 XII. hand, we may never incur the guilt of a  
 crime so aggravated, (when it is at all a  
 crime) and attended with such destructive  
 consequences; nor, on the other, be at all  
 alarm'd at it, when it is only *a mere name*,  
 and *brand of infamy*.

Schism, in its original signification, is  
 no more than a *rent*, or a *division*. Ac-  
 cordingly in all the passages of the New  
 Testament, except the text, where the words  
 σχισμα and σχισμαλα are used, they are thus  
 rendered by our translators. So we read,  
 in one of our Saviour's allusions, that a  
*piece of new cloth, put to an old garment,*  
*taketh from the garment, and the rent is*  
*made worse*. We read likewise of a *divi-*  
*sion, or schism, among the people*, i. e. of  
 their entertaining different sentiments of  
 Christ. Several other passages might be  
 added, but these two are sufficient to shew  
 that the word schism, as well as heresy, is  
 us'd in an *indifferent* sense; and that the  
 lawfulness, or unlawfulness of it, is en-  
 tirely to be determined by *circumstances*.  
 Common use, indeed, in our own language,  
 always affixes to the term an idea of guilt;  
 and therefore I am obliged in the follow-  
 ing

Mat. ix.  
16.

John vii.  
43.

\*  
The  
for n  
other  
order

ing discourse, in order to adapt it to modern disputes, to consider it as a *criminal* SERM. XII.  
*vitious* thing, and shall endeavour to state the true notion of it under that character.

In general, then, there can be no such thing as schism, but in cases where there is an obligation to *unity* and *communion*, so that in order to define the nature of it justly, we must find out some *center* of union, which is common to all Christians: And this must be either *uniformity* of sentiment in matters of speculative belief, or in external modes of worship and discipline; or else, if it be unreasonable to expect either of these, the only center of unity that remains is *charity* and *mutual forbearance*, notwithstanding lesser differences, where there is an assent to all the necessary principles of Christian faith \*, and the profession of Christianity is prov'd to be sincere by a regular and virtuous life.

U 2

Let

\* If it be ask'd, what these necessary principles are? The answer is easy, *viz.* that unless we will leave room for multiplying articles of faith *infinitely*, they can be no other than what are expressly required to be believed, in order to our obtaining the Christian salvation. And of this

SERM. LET us examine this matter distinctly.

XII. And,

I. As for *uniformity* of sentiment in matters of *speculative belief*, that can never be the *common center* of Christian unity, because it is in the nature of things *impossible*. For in order to this, all mankind must have exactly the same strength of understanding, the same advantages, the same manner of education, the same passions, prejudices, and interests; but as there

this kind we find nothing in the whole New Testament but that *single* article, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," including in it the belief of his miracles, and resurrection, and the extraordinary powers communicated to the Apostles, which are the standing evidence of the truth of the gospel. There are two passages, in St. John's first epistle, so distinct, and full to this purpose, that they can't be evaded by any arts of criticism, but what will confound and darken the plainest sense of words, and destroy the very use of language: *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God*; chap. iv. 15. and again, *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*, chap. v. 1. So that every one that assents to this fundamental truth, and sincerely endeavours to understand the revelation, and act according to it, must be a true Christian, and intitled to the *friendship* and *communion* of Christians; and to deny him this privilege, on *whimsical* notions of the importance, or necessity of particular schemes, not *expressly* warranted and supported by scripture, is unjust, antichristian, and *schismatical*.

there is an almost *infinite variety* in all SERM.  
these respects, differences of opinion will XII.  
necessarily arise; and the contrary can't  
be hop'd for by any one that knows hu-  
man nature, much less can it be required  
by the infinite wisdom of our supreme go-  
vernour. Besides, if all Christians must  
concur in the same way of thinking about  
every controversy in religion, whose opi-  
nion shall prevail; and be made the *pub-*  
*lic standard?*—Are the *majority* to  
decide for us?—How shall we determine,  
without collecting the vote of every indi-  
vidual, who are the *majority*?—The  
greatest numbers in our own, or any other  
particular country, may be the *minor*  
part with respect to the whole body of  
Christians; and, besides, the *real sense* of  
the people may be very different from  
establish'd forms, and in many instances,  
from their own public profession. But al-  
lowing we could settle this first and most  
essential point, which, in truth, can hard-  
ly be settled, are the majority always in  
the *right*? Or must we, for the sake of  
uniformity, profess (*believe we cannot*) a-  
gainst truth and reason? Will not this  
make all religion *dissimulation* and *hypo-*  
*crisy*?



SERM. *crisy*? Will it not drive us back to all  
 XII. the errors and superstitions of *Popery*?

~ Nay, will it not oblige us to renounce even Christianity itself for the *Mahometan* imposture, or *Pagan* idolatry, both of which, if the vote of the *majority* is to determine, seem to stand upon a much better foundation? This is undoubtedly the point in which this principle must terminate, if pursued through all its just and natural consequences; for the *majority* of Christians have no more a right to judge for the *whole body* of Christians, than the *greatest part* of mankind for *all the rest* of mankind.

BUT if *uniformity* of opinion can't be secured in this way; shall we not be govern'd by the most *learn'd* and *pious* Christians, who are neither influenced by irregular passion, nor sway'd by criminal prejudice, and have examin'd all the parts of religion with the greatest exactness and impartiality? I answer, that who are *really* the most learned and pious will be matter of endless dispute, and can never be *certainly* fix'd. Or if it could, there is still this objection against admitting their judgment as a *decisive* rule, that they  
 are

are *fallible* as well as others; and have SERM. frequently asserted and maintain'd such XII. principles, as derogate highly from the honour of God, and are of vast disservice to religion.—Must we then give up the direction of our faith to our *spiritual instructors*, the *governours* of the church? This will leave us in equal confusion and uncertainty.—For who are they?—If the *ecclesiastics* of every nation are to appoint and settle the *national* faith, there is likely to be the same *variety* and *inconsistency* in it, as if it was left to every man's own private reason; or if the greatest number are to fix the *general* faith of Christians, we must give up our *understandings*, our *senses*, our *humanity*, for the follies and cruelties of *Popish* superstition. Or, finally, if we are to submit to the religion of the *civil magistrate*, exactly the same consequences will follow from it; the same inconsistency of principles and practices, all suppos'd to be essential parts of the one true religion (which by the way, is making religion itself a *contradiction*.) For this way of establishing *uniformity* of opinion under one government will, in different countries, as

SERM. necessarily establish a *variety*; and be,  
 XII. withal, of equal, nay, of much greater  
 service to *Mahometanism*, and *Heathenism*,  
 then to the cause of Christianity. It ap-  
 pears then from what has been said, that  
 to endeavour to bring all mankind to the  
 same sentiments in matters of religious con-  
 troversy, is an *absurd, romantic* scheme,  
 and represents religion as nothing else but  
 outward *formality, artifice, and craft*,  
 or a mere piece of *state-convenience* and  
*policy*.

THE same may be said of *uniformity* in  
*external modes* of worship and discipline,  
*viz.* that this, likewise, cannot be a ne-  
 cessary term of Christian communion.  
 For it will be altogether as difficult to  
 determine, who are to settle external rites  
 and ceremonies, and forms of church-go-  
 vernment, as articles of speculative be-  
 lief; and the very same wild consequences  
 will follow, from allowing it to the *ma-  
 jority*, the *church*, or the *civil magistrate*,  
 in one case, as in the other. Besides, the  
 lawfulness, expediency, or divine autho-  
 rity of any particular form is as much a  
 matter of *private* opinion and speculation,  
 as the truth or falsehood of doctrinal pro-  
 positions:

positions: And therefore, it is as natural SERM.  
to expect a *variety* of sentiments about it. XII.

INDEED the plain truth of the case lies here. Every man has an *unalienable* right to judge, for himself, what principles are just and rational, and what form of religion is most acceptable to God. It is absolute nonsense to talk of any thing in religion, that is not entirely founded on inward *conviction*, and *choice*. If we exclude this, and suppose that private persons are bound to submit to a *public* conscience, and to *establish'd* notions of order and decency, we build religion on the *ruins* of human reason; and may indeed make it *any thing*, be it ever so weak and trifling, ever so much mischievous and hurtful, ever so contrary to the moral perfections of God, and the immutable principles of truth and righteousness. And at this rate is it worthy a *wise* man's concern? Can it deserve to be *supported*? Would it not rather be for the interest of mankind, if it was absolutely *banish'd* the world? On the contrary, if it be (as it must if it be any thing at all) a *personal* thing, and all are at liberty to judge and determine



SERM. determine for themselves, in every circumstance, what is fit and proper; and  
 XII. if Christianity makes no alteration in mens *natural rights*; the inference to be made from hence is most obvious and undeniable, *viz.* that no mere difference of opinion, either in matters of speculative belief, or about outward forms of worship and discipline, can destroy necessary Christian unity, which, upon every other supposition is a *chimera*, an absolute *impossibility*.

If this be allow'd, it may be ask'd, what will become of *public order*? I answer, what is *public order*? It can't be *uniformity* in matters of mere opinion, for that has been shewn to be impossible; and there will be no more *disorder* from a variety of sentiments in religion, than from different schemes of philosophy, politics, œconomy, or different rules of civil life; nay, than from the difference of mens faces, natural tempers, circumstances, or the infinite variety that appears in the constitution of the universe, which yet, upon the whole, is perfectly *harmonious* and *beautiful*. The *right order*

der of things with respect to mankind, S E R M.  
 who are intelligent beings, and endu'd XII.  
 with moral powers, is, when *every indi-*  
*vidual* exercises his reason, and forms his  
 notions of religion for himself, and the  
 more strictly this *order* is preserv'd, dif-  
 ferences, in lesser matters, will be more  
 unavoidable and necessary. — They are  
 only *imaginary* rules or order of human  
 contrivance, perverting the *natural order*  
 that God has establish'd, with which such  
 differences are at all inconsistent.

LET me add to this, that a *variety* of  
 sentiments in religion, while moderation  
 and mutual charity are maintained, can  
 do no hurt, as well as create no confusion;  
 whereas an attempt to introduce *public*  
*uniformity* and the imposing *unscriptural*  
 terms of communion, have been a con-  
 stant source of schisms in the church, and  
 as long as they continue, will infallibly  
 keep alive a spirit of animosity, and per-  
 petuate contention and violence.

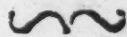
AND finally, when there is a *difference*  
 of opinions, and a *variety* of outward  
 forms, this is just such a state of things as  
 a wise man would expect if all were *honest*  
 and

SERM. and *impartial* enquirers; whereas if *one*  
 XII. *sett* of principles, and the *same scheme* of  
 worship and discipline, not diversify'd in  
 the minutest circumstance, were univer-  
 sally to prevail, it would not look like  
*human nature*; it would have nothing of  
 the appearance of *sincerity*; and, con-  
 sequently, must lead an indifferent spec-  
 tator to conclude, that religion was all  
*complaisance, courtliness, and carnal poli-*  
*cy*, and did not spring from a conviction  
 of the understanding, or a free, deliberate  
 choice.

From what has been said, I would  
 make a few observations relating to the  
 nature and guilt of schism, and so con-  
 clude. And,

1<sup>st</sup>, It appears, that let there be ever  
 so many *differences* amongst Christians, as  
 long as *mutual charity* is preserv'd, there  
 cannot be the guilt of schism. Even the  
 church of *Rome*, so corrupt as it is, and  
 so grossly as it has perverted the doctrines  
 and institutions of the Christian religion,  
 would not be *schismatical*, if it did not  
 confine Christianity to its own faction,  
 and make party-peculiarities necessary

terms



terms of communion; and thereby re-  
nounce all friendship and unity with Chri-  
stians of a different persuasion. A man  
that holds the common faith of the Go-  
spel, leads a holy life, behaves peaceably,  
and has charity for all, notwithstanding  
the little varieties by which they are di-  
stinguished from each other, does not  
differ from any church so far as it is form'd  
on the *essential* principles of Christianity;  
but only takes that liberty of judging  
for himself, which *reason* allows, and *re-  
velation* confirms to him; a liberty to dif-  
fer from *fallible* expositions of scripture,  
from *civil* constitutions, or *ecclesiastical*  
ordinances of rather less authority. For  
if any person's judgment ought to be sub-  
mitted to as a *public* standard, it should  
certainly be that of the civil magistrate;  
who, generally speaking, must have less  
temptation, than those who pretend to a  
*distinct* and *independent* jurisdiction, to in-  
troduce such schemes of religion as are  
injurious to mankind, and destructive of  
the security, order, and happiness of so-  
ciety. So that *alienation* of affection,  
and a *turbulent, excommunicating* spirit,  
are



SERM. are the essence of schism, and not mere

XII. difference of opinion; not the use of *different* ceremonies, or of *no* ceremonies at all; or joining ourselves to any particular religious communion. For, according to St. Paul, (who in several passages blames the *Corinthians* for divisions or schisms among themselves in the same community) this crime may be committed where there is no separation from a particular church: And consequently they that *differ uncharitably*, whether they belong all to one, or form distinct worshipping assemblies (and they alone) are schismatics; and to throw the odium and infamy of this character on any *peaceable* denominations of Christians, is mere scandal and calumny.

2dly, Differences among Christians are not only *innocent*, while unity of affection is preserved, but there are many cases, in which a separation from a particular church is absolutely *necessary*. This is universally allow'd when its worship is *idolatrous* or *superstitious*, or it requires *unlawful* terms of communion; and therefore I shall insist no longer upon it, but only observe, that what is an idolatrous  
or

or superstitious worship, or what are *real-ly* unlawful terms of communion, can't be determin'd by any *public* authority, but must be left to the *private judgment* of every man's mind. And, consequently,

SERM.  
XII.  
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IN the third place, none, who are truly *honest*, who are not sway'd by irregular passions, or vicious prejudices, but, upon a deliberate impartial enquiry, according to their capacity and advantages, think themselves oblig'd, in *conscience*, to dissent from their brethren; no such persons as these, I say, can possibly incur the guilt of *Schism*: For this would be to make *honesty itself* a crime; and at the same time that we suppose it a man's duty to act according to the light and directions of his conscience, to reproach and condemn him for it. Particular scruples may indeed be *groundless*, the judgment we form, and upon which we take the liberty to separate from others, may be *erroneous*; but are there no allowances to be made for the weakness and fallibility of human reason? Is not this every honest man's *misfortune*, rather than his *fault*? Will not the merciful

SERM. ciful governour of the world overlook it?

XII. And shall not we treat such a one with candour and humanity, notwithstanding his *involuntary* errors?——Or shall we run him down with reproach and infamy?——If men of real integrity may be schismatics purely for being mistaken, and having an over-strict and scrupulous conscience, schism must be perfectly *innocent*, because it always has been, and ever will be, in innumerable cases, *unavoidable*. Or if it be still insisted on that such differences are highly criminal, and displeasing to God, tho' they are not, at all, the matter of our *choice*, this will be to make guilt and misery necessary; which, if it was really a doctrine of Christianity, must be such a strong *intrinsic* mark of imposture, so absolutely contrary to all our notions of the wisdom, and justice, not to say the goodness of God, that no miracles, how *great* or *numerous* soever, would be sufficient to establish its authority.

BUT is it not our duty to sacrifice a few scruples for the *peace* of the church?——Not one.—For if the peace of the church can't be secur'd without giving up conscience

conscience, honour, and integrity, it is SERM.  
better it be *disturbed*; better there were XII.  
*no church at all*, than that the cause of  
true piety and virtue should suffer by it.  
Besides, how is this peace broken by the  
scrupulous dissent of an honest mind from  
establish'd opinions, and forms of wor-  
ship, while he behaves *charitably*, and is  
content with enjoying his own liberty,  
without *insulting* and *censuring* others?  
Nothing, surely, can hinder, but the  
*church* may be at peace as well as the  
*state*, notwithstanding a variety of senti-  
ments and manners, unless it be that the  
*imposing party*, who call themselves the  
church, are resolv'd there shall be no  
peace till all submit to their authority,  
and comply with their humours and pre-  
judices; till they have brought about an  
uniformity in *trifles*, that have not the  
least relation to true Christianity; which  
is a *monstrous* attempt in itself, and, if  
ever it prevails, will probably banish re-  
ligion and virtue out of the world, to  
make way for outward form and hypo-  
crisy. I may add, that the *modesty* of  
such persons is very extraordinary, as well



SERM. as their inclination to an harmony and  
 XII. union with their brethren, who can de-  
 fire *them* to act against their consciences  
 for the sake of peace, *i. e.* in other words,  
 only to silence their own unreasonable  
 clamours, who are determin'd to be satisf-  
 fy'd on no softer terms; and yet refuse to  
 abate a few *indifferent* ceremonies (which  
 are of no use in religion but to engender  
 strife and variance, and which they have  
 no pretence of *conscience* for keeping) to  
 remove offence from honest minds, and  
 thereby restore the public tranquillity.  
 In all such differences as these, if there  
 be really the guilt of schism, it will not  
 fall on men of *scrupulous integrity*, who  
 cannot, without forfeiting their virtue,  
 comply with what is requir'd of them;  
 but on the *rigid imposers* of human  
 schemes, who by their stiffness cause the  
 division, and all the rancour and animosity  
 that attends it\*.

Nay,

\* It may be thought, perhaps, that, in some things, I  
 have confounded heresy with schism, and schism with  
 heresy. I think it proper, therefore, just to observe, that  
 tho' the two ideas are really distinct, so that a man may  
 espouse

Nay, even tho' the terms of communion, with any particular church, are allow'd to be *lawful*, it does not from thence follow, that I am oblig'd to worship stately with it; but if I think the constitution and manner of worship, in other churches, more *expedient* and *useful*, I am certainly at full liberty, as a *man*, and a *christian*, to join with them. My differing from the *majority* does not break the peace, if I act with moderation and candour; I do nothing but what I have a *right* to do, and am not answer-

SERM.

XII.

espouse the interests of a particular faction against true Christianity, without going so far as to renounce communion with other Christians, and therefore without being a *schismatic*; and, on the contrary, may be the cause of very unnecessary, uncharitable, and fatal divisions in the church, and yet not act against conscience, nor, consequently, be, in the sense of St. Paul, an *heretic*; notwithstanding, I say, that these things may *possibly* happen, 'tis undeniable that both these crimes *frequently* meet in the same characters, and natural to expect that they will, *generally*, go together. And this I take to be a sufficient justification of what I advanc'd, *viz.* that a *violent party spirit*, that puts men upon *excommunicating* and *unchristianing* the rest of the world, is the true nature and highest guilt of *schism*; and for the reasons alledged, under the last head of the foregoing discourse, one of the most *suspicious* marks of *heresy*.

SERM. able for *accidental* consequences ; but the

XII. whole guilt of them must lie at their door, who take occasion, from an *innocent* circumstance, to foment a spirit of *faction* and *discord*. Not that I am against a *compliant* temper, in order to reconcile religious differences ; but there is no reason that the compliance should be all on *one side*. We ought not to submit too *tamely*, for fear of establishing *arbitrary* power ; and I can't but think that it may be of great use to stand up against unwarrantable incroachments and impositions, for the sake of the *common rights* of mankind, which are thereby invaded. But when those who separate become censorious and rigid, when they think of themselves as the only Christians, and confine their affection and esteem to persons of their own sentiments and party, though their *separation* might be justified, if they had conscience to plead, their *uncharitableness* makes them schismatics : So that as there are cases, in which only *one side* is guilty of schism, there are others in which both are chargeable with it, the imposers of human forms, and those who dissent from them ;

them; viz. when they condemn, re-  
 proach, and uncharitably refuse commu-  
 nion with each other.

SERM.  
 XII.

UPON the whole, would we avoid the guilt both of *heresy* and *schism*?—Let us be *honest* and *peaceable*.—In all the differences which we may have with our brethren, let us act with moderation, and maintain an humble, charitable, condescending temper.—Though they may require such things of us, as may hinder our joining with 'em in *their* communion, let us keep open *our own*; and be ready to receive *sincere* Christians of *every* denomination.—And when we have done all, that is in our power, to *preserve* or *restore* peace, we may patiently bear the abuses of *slandrous* tongues; and leave bigots, and the advocates for church-power and imposition, to the *tortures* of their own *narrow, gloomy, and restless* minds, and the *contempt* they will certainly meet with, from all the *rational, good-natured, and ingenuous* part of mankind.





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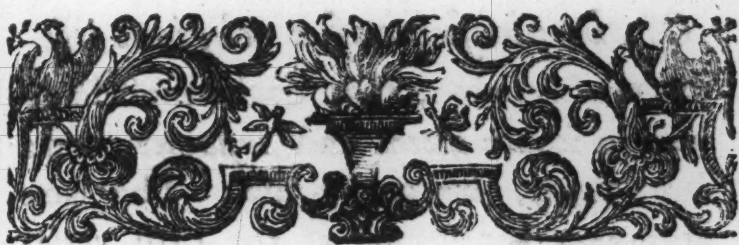
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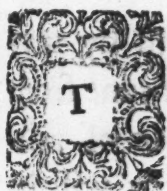
## S E R M O N XIII.

Of the pleasures of a religious life.

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PROV. iii. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
and all her paths are peace.*



THESE words are part of <sup>SERM.</sup>  
Solomon's description of the <sup>XIII.</sup>  
advantages of *wisdom*, or true  
religion, which, contrary to the  
general method of this book (compos'd  
for the most part of independent sentences)  
he pursues in a connected discourse. He  
begins the chapter with recommending a  
strict regard to the rules of virtue from

SERM. this consideration, that 'tis the most likely

XIII. way to secure *esteem* and *influence*, and a

*long, happy, honourable* life: The same argument is resumed at the 13th verse; and the whole is wrought up with so much *beauty* and *elegance*, that I choose to give it in the language of the wise author himself: *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou can'st desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness; and all her paths are peace.* I shall only add by way of introduction, that if the argument from *pleasure* appears to be on the side of religion, it may be hoped its efficacy will be *universal*; since a desire of happiness is an *inextinguishable* principle in human nature, and one of the most powerful motives, by which the bulk of mankind are determin'd. In my following discourse, I shall,

I. PRE-

I. PREMISE a few things, very briefly, SERM.  
XIII.  
for explaining and illustrating the  
observation contained in the text.

And then, which is the chief part  
of my design, proceed to show,

II. THE *peculiar excellency* of the pleasures of religion and virtue.

THE *first* thing that I would premise is, that what is here said of the pleasures of religion supposes that persons are, in some degree, *inured* to the practice of it, and have a virtuous disposition and turn of mind: For without this there can be no more a taste of *divine* and *moral* pleasures, than of *animal* gratifications without the senses. Every pleasure must have its faculty of *perceiving*, suited and adapted to it. And therefore to those who have led a dissolute irregular life, the ways of religion are at first ungrateful and burthenfome; because they not only oppose the current of the animal passions, but stubborn and inveterate habits; and so oblige them to offer, for some time at least, a kind of *violence* to nature. But when corrupt ap-  
petites



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SERM. petites are subdued, vitious prejudices re-

XIII. mov'd, and contrary principles fixed with-  
 in us, then religion is *easy*, and the duties

of it are *delightful*. And the pleasures of piety, as will hereafter be shewn, are beyond comparison the most excellent that human nature is capable of; suited to its dignity, worthy its exalted capacities, substantial and durable; so that when a man comes to practise it with *freedom*, he begins to enjoy himself, and his noble faculties in their right order, and lives in a manner agreeable to his high original, and the design of his creation. Nay, even the *controuling* licentious inclinations, as 'tis a *rational*, *generous*, and *manly* action, must of consequence, notwithstanding the trouble and mortification that attends it, afford much greater and more sublime satisfaction to the mind, than any that can spring from an *indulgence* of them. Again,

2dly. In interpreting *Solomon's* observation we must except *extraordinary* cases; as we are oblig'd to do with respect to many other general propositions, which are only suppos'd to hold true in the common course of things. The case, for example,  
of

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of *violent persecution*, an evil indeed, that, SERM.  
upon the whole, happens but seldom, and XIII.  
may be avoided in part, even when a spirit of oppression prevails, by a discreet and moderate behaviour; the case, I say, of *violent persecution* must be particularly excepted; which may, in a great measure, destroy the natural advantages resulting from the practice of virtue. However, it can't be denied, that a very considerable pleasure will arise from acting a *brave* and *steady* part, and adhering inflexibly to our duty under the bitterest reproaches and sufferings; and the inward shame and uneasiness, which a man of a generous temper must feel, on a cowardly deserting the cause of truth and righteousness, may *equal*, and sometimes, perhaps, *exceed* the inconveniences that the good man labours under, and bears with a patient, firm, unshaken mind, in maintenance of his integrity.

FINALLY, we are to understand the words of the text, not as speaking of what is always *fact*, but of the direct and natural *tendency* of the thing. The pleasures of religion may be destroy'd by *dark* and *gloomy* notions of it, or by the influence

SERM. ence of a *melancholy* habit: But when  
 XIII. there is nothing in mens particular complexion, inclining to *spleen* and *dejectedness*, nothing in their scheme of religion, that leads to superstitious *rigour* and *severity*, when its duties are rightly understood, and carefully practis'd, the genuine effect of it is inward compofure and satisfaction: *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* And, indeed, how can it be otherwise, when religion allows of all the innocent and defireable pleasures even of the *sensitive* kind, and by promoting the health of our bodies, and the chearfulness and serenity of our minds, *heightens* every other enjoyment; when 'tis nothing else but acting up to the *reason* and *truth* of things, an imitation of the moral perfections of God, and, consequently, the *rectitude* and *supreme dignity* of human nature; and will therefore procure for us the acceptance and favour of our great Creator, and a glorious and eternal reward. These necessary rules for understanding the text being premis'd, I proceed to shew,  
 2dly. THE *peculiar excellency* of the pleasures of religion and virtue; that they  
 are



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are the highest mankind are capable of; SERM.  
have every thing in them that can recom- XIII.

mend any pleasures to the pursuit of rational beings; and infinitely the advantage, in many respects, over all other enjoyments whatsoever. This I take to be the most necessary part of a discourse on this subject; and the only consideration that is likely to reclaim those, whose judgments are perverted and darkened by a long indulgence of irregular affections. Even such persons, who are unhappily enslaved to vice, will, I suppose, make no scruple of allowing, that there *may be* pleasures in a religious life, and the strict practice of virtue, where there is a *proper disposition* of mind to relish them; nay, moreover, that where this is the *particular turn*, they may afford a much more agreeable entertainment than any other pursuits of a different kind. But then they will be apt to plead, that mens pleasures are as various as their *inclinations* and *tempers*, and the *prevailing principles* by which they are influenced; and, of consequence, as they find in themselves a *contrary taste*, whether it be from nature, or custom, the  
happi-



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SERM. happiness that is most *suitable* for them  
 XIII. must lie quite another way; that they  
 have no notion of any greater or more  
 desirable pleasures than what they *already* enjoy; and that it is unreasonable  
 to expect they should give up those delights  
 which they have always been *used* to, and  
 know the *sweetness* and *value* of, for others  
 which they never *experienced*, and perhaps  
 shall never bring themselves thoroughly  
 to *approve*; nay, which, for ought they  
 know, may have no real foundation in  
*nature*, but spring entirely from a *particular*  
*warmth* of *enthusiasm*, that only a  
 few are capable of.

WHAT method now must we take to  
 convince such men of the weakness and  
 sophistry of their reasonings, and that  
 they miserably deceive and impose upon  
 themselves?—Will it be sufficient to  
 tell them barely, that there are pleasures  
 in the practice of *religion* and *virtue*?—  
 To this they will answer, that there are  
 pleasures, likewise, in the pursuits of *ambition*  
 and *sensuality*.—The only way  
 therefore that we can follow is, to shew,  
 that there is, in nature, a *difference* be-  
 tween

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tween the several pleasures to which man- SERM.  
kind are addicted; that their particular XIII.  
sentiments, prejudices, affections, and  
habits don't *destroy*, or in reality at all  
*lessen*, this *necessary difference*; and that  
the *superiority* on all accounts, whether it  
be in respect of *purity, solidity, duration*,  
and every other circumstance that can  
help to furnish out the most *complete* sa-  
tisfaction, is on the side of the pleasures  
of the virtuous man. And this I shall  
attempt to do in the remaining part of  
my discourse; and hope, that tho' I must  
be oblig'd, by reducing this noble subject,  
which can hardly be exhausted, within so  
narrow a compass, to treat of it *partially*  
and *imperfectly*, sufficient hints may how-  
ever be suggested, to recommend a reli-  
gious life not only to the *graver* and more  
*considerate* part of this audience, but even  
to those, if there are any such, who are  
of a *gayer* turn, and have no esteem of any  
thing but as it contributes to their plea-  
sures.

I MIGHT begin with this, that the plea-  
sures of religion are *manly*, i. e. they are  
the exercise of our *noblest* faculties, and

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SERM. alone suited to the *distinguishing* capacities of human nature. Indeed it must be own'd, that sensible gratifications are agreeable to *one part* of our frame, in which there are strong appetites, planted by the all-wise Creator himself, that demand such gratifications; and, consequently, they may, within certain bounds, be *innocently* and *regularly* indulg'd. But are these the *peculiar* pleasures for which mankind were form'd, and endu'd with those excellent powers that advance them so eminently above the animal creation? No one can bring himself to assert, or even to imagine this, who has ever consider'd his own make and constitution. *Reason* and *reflection* are of very little use to us in sensual enjoyments; which are found perhaps in much greater strength and perfection among the brutes, who have nothing of this *sublime*, *over-ruling*, *directing* principle, but are led only by *instinct* and *appetite*. Nay, it is not a mere *possible* supposition, but highly *probable*, since these are the only enjoyments they are capable of; and, besides, this further reason may be given, from the

wisdom



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wisdom and goodness of God, why man-kind should not have so *exquisite* a taste of pleasures that depend on the bodily senses as inferior creatures, *viz.* lest their affections, which in the present state are apt to be most *impetuous* and *extravagant* this way, should be quite engaged and captivated by *lower* and *meaner* gratifications, to the neglect of much more *considerable*, even *intellectual* and *moral* pleasures. It appears, then, that the indulgences of sense are not the *peculiar* pleasures of a man, and have nothing at all to do with his *noblest*, his *distinguishing* faculties: They are not, indeed, *unworthy* human nature in its state of *minority*; but may as properly be call'd *brutal*, as *manly* pleasures. On the contrary, the pleasures of which we are capable by means of our rational nature, are of an absolutely different kind: They are the pleasures of *piety*, *justice*, *gratitude*, *benevolence*, and a regular *self-government*: These therefore most *naturally* and *strictly* belong to us as men, and, of consequence, must be our *supreme* entertainment and delight. But perhaps it will

SERM.

XIII.



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SERM. have little influence, against strong pre-  
 XIII. judice and habit on the side of vice, to  
 shew that the pleasures of religion are  
*manly*, and argue their *superior excellency*  
 from thence ; I shall therefore endeavour  
 to prove that they are, *in their own na-*  
*ture*, preferable to all other enjoyments.  
 And,

1<sup>st</sup>. THE pleasures of virtue suppose all  
 those *unruly passions* to be subdu'd, or,  
 at least, controul'd and moderated, which  
 are the cause of the greatest disorders and  
 miseries in human life ; all the *sensual*  
*passions* to be corrected, and kept within  
 their just limits, that they may neither  
 impair our health, corrupt and debase our  
 minds, or injure our fellow-creatures ;  
 all the disorderly motions of *pride* and  
*envy* suppress'd ; and the violent trans-  
 ports of *anger* and *revenge* check'd and  
 restrain'd ; in short, every thing *calm* and  
*serene*, every affection and appetite obe-  
 dient to the *still dictates* of reason, and,  
 consequently, creating neither disturbance  
*within*, nor confusion *without*. The right  
 government of the passions is an impor-  
 tant and essential branch of virtue, and  
 one

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one of the chief pleasures that attend SERM.  
the practice of it : For besides the num- XIII.  
berless vexations and inquietudes which it  
prevents, it is a sedate, uniform, *self-en-*  
*joyment*, that no affluence of *outward pro-*  
*sperity*, no splendor of *greatness*, no *starts*  
and *flashes* of pleasure, no *short-liv'd ex-*  
*tafies* can compensate for the want of:  
Thus *compos'd* are the pleasures of religion.  
But can the same be said of any other  
pleasures? Far from it. To instance only  
in *sensual* indulgences ; while a man is the  
most eager in the pursuit of them, he  
may pine away with envy, be toss'd and  
agitated by furious resentments, or rack'd  
with the torments of disappointed ambi-  
tion : Nay, they won't so much as re-  
move the uneasiness arising from the par-  
ticular appetites to which they are im-  
mediately adapted ; but as, before enjoy-  
ment, they are *restless* and *violent*, by  
frequent gratification they become more  
*inflamed* and *insatiable*.

2dly, It is another excellent property  
of the pleasures of religion and virtue, that  
they will bear the *strictest* review, and  
improve upon *reflection*. Let a man exa-

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SERM. mine, ever so carefully, the pleasures he  
 XIII. feels on having faithfully discharg'd his  
 ~~~~~ duty to God, and practis'd that reverence and submission, that love and gratitude, which are immutably due, from all rational beings, to the Father of the universe, the eternal and inexhaustible fountain of good ; the pleasures of impartial justice, and generous, diffusive benevolence ; or those that spring from temperance and chastity, keeping all his passions under strict government, and denying himself every irregular gratification, however agreeable to his warmest and strongest inclinations : Let him examine these pleasures (I say) ever so carefully, and they will all appear to be worthy his most excellent faculties, the *dignity* and *refinement* of his nature. He will find himself so constituted, that it is impossible for him to avoid being delighted with the review of such a regular, honourable, and amiable conduct ; and there is nothing but a sense of his defects, and not having cultivated these virtues in a higher degree, that can give the least check to his inward satisfaction. Every

new

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new reflection is a repetition of the pleasure. SERM.
XIII.

BUT the enjoyments of sense, if pursu'd with the utmost prudence and moderation, will be found to be, at best, but *innocent*. There is nothing in them that shews the *excellency* of our constitution, above that of the creatures below us; and, consequently, it is not in their nature to yield that generous and sublime delight, that arises from exercises of piety and virtue. Nay there is, really, something *mortifying* that attends a just estimate and consideration of them; as they discover to us the *weakness* and *imperfection* of our present frame, and the *disorders* to which it is liable. For by means of that very *animal* composition, which renders us capable of enjoyments of this kind, we are subject to innumerable inconveniencies; not only to ungovern'd passions, and the fatal extravagancies that they continually produce, but to dejected spirits, confus'd and melancholy thoughts, sickness, pain, and all the evils of mortality. And if the indulgences of sense, even when they are most regular, yield

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SERM. so little comfort on a review, and are
 XIII. rather a *humbling* consideration, than a
 source of real satisfaction to the mind;
 in what a disagreeable light must the
excesses of luxury and *vicious* pleasure ap-
 pear, upon cool and impartial reflection?
 These, the natural consequences of which,
 where there is not an hardened insensible
 temper, are nothing but *confusion*, *shame*,
 and *remorse*, can't bear a comparison with
 the rational pleasures of religion, which,
 the more they are *considered*, must be the
 more thoroughly *approved*. Religious
 pleasures are, of all others, the most *pure*
 and *unmixt*, not interrupted in the enjoy-
 ment with disquieting suspicions, nor suc-
 ceeded by uneasy terrors: And this is one
 of their noblest and most recommending
 properties; a property that can never be-
 long to any enjoyments, however, for
 the *moment* they last, *transporting*, how-
 ever *applauded* and *admired*, that reason
 condemns. And nothing can more fully
 demonstrate the folly of such irregular
 indulgences than this, that it is abso-
 lutely impossible for any man to be hap-
 py, whose favourite gratifications leave a
sting

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sting behind them, who is *ashamed* of his conduct, and at *variance* with himself. SERM. XIII.

3dly. THE pleasures of religion depend entirely on *ourselves*, and not on those numberless accidents, which may either prevent, or blast, or entirely destroy all outward pleasures:—Not on the *senses*, which may lose their quickness;—not on the *animal passions*, which may grow faint and languid;—not on the return of an *over-loaded* and *jaded* appetite;—not on mutual *agreement* and *confederacy*;—not on *critical* seasons, and *special* opportunities;—nor on the *jealousies*, *passions*, and *opposite interests* of our fellow-creatures. These things have almost the sole influence in forming, and disposing of, the pleasures of the *ambitious* and the *sensualist*; but those that spring from virtue are *free* and *independent*: Being seated in the mind, they may be enjoy'd in their greatest refinement when the body decays, and the edge of all its appetites is blunted. The malice and power of the most formidable oppressors, who may take from us all the outward accommodations of life, can't deprive us

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SERM. of them——They forsake us not even
XIII. in *solitude*.——But if we were banished

the society of all mankind, a consciousness of our integrity, while we convers'd in the world, and the reflection on the simplicity and rectitude of our manners, would furnish out a *great* and *noble* entertainment. And as the pleasures of a good life depend entirely on *ourselves*, it is in our power to be always *increasing* them by a greater proficiency in virtue; whereas those of sense are, according to *fix'd* and *stated* laws of nature, by us unalterable. We may, indeed, animate and raise our *imagination*s, and promise ourselves, *beforehand*, extraordinary scenes of delight; but with all our art can do but little, if any thing at all, to heighten the actual enjoyment.

AGAIN, another very considerable commendation of the pleasures of religion is, that they can never be pursued to an *excess*:——never beyond the most deliberate dictates of reason;——never to bring a just reproach upon ourselves;——or to the injury of others. On the contrary, the more we are employ'd in these

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these pleasures, and, consequently, in cultivating the solid principles of virtue, on which they are founded, the more shall we *ennoble* and *exalt* our nature, and be more *extensively* useful to mankind. But the *excesses* of other kinds of pleasure are daily *notorious*, and fill the world with the utmost confusion and misery. They impair *health*, consume the *substance*, bring infamy upon the *character*, introduce most deplorable distress into *families*, and violate the general peace and order of *human society*. Instead of *enlarging* the mind, and inspiring sentiments of generosity, their natural effect is to *enervate* and *soften* it, and render it unfit for all that is great and manly. In short, they are, in this particular, quite the *reverse* of the pleasures of religion, that in every instance the greatest difficulty is, to prevent their being carried to an *excess*; for without great prudence, care, and resolution, they will infallibly be attended with most pernicious consequences, and hurry us on to very fatal extremes.

5thly. RELIGIOUS pleasures are our *best*, our *only* support, under the disappoint-

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SERM. ments and calamities of life. There are
 XIII. *lesser* cares, which a person may possibly
 ~~~~~ divert, at least in some degree, by a  
 course of intemperance and luxury; by  
 constantly inflaming his passions, and do-  
 ing his utmost to keep reason asleep:  
 But this is not so much the *patience* and  
*firmness* of a *man*, as the *stupidity* of a  
*brute*. And after all, as insensible as the  
 sinner may appear to be in the midst of  
 his affected gaiety, his mind may be *con-*  
*fus'd*, and an utter stranger to a *settled*  
 cheerfulness and peace: Or, however,  
 there are some circumstances, in which  
 all outward comforts must fail him, and  
 leave him quite destitute of relief. Let  
 us suppose, for instance, that he labours  
 under decays of nature, or is tormented  
 with acute pains, or under the *immediate*  
*apprehensions* of death; in such a condition  
 as this, when he is altogether incapable  
 of any of those sensual gratifications,  
 which he has always pursued as the sum  
 of his felicity, will the remembrance of  
*past* pleasures refresh and bear up his spi-  
 rits? Quite the contrary. They must  
 appear, at best, to be *insignificant*, and  
*trifling*;

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*trifling* ; and it is natural to expect, that a review of the guilty scene will *alarm*, and fill him with *horror*, and render his other miseries more heavy and unsupportable. SERM. XIII.

BUT the good man, who has acted as became him, and steadily adher'd to the rules of virtue and religion, has in all such *critical seasons* of distress, a solid and substantial support. The integrity of his heart will keep him from *sinking*. The perfect resignation of his mind to providence will prevent his being *ruffled* and *discompos'd*. Nay, his pleasures will not desert him in the very *last extremity* of nature ; but a sense of his Maker's favour, and the prospect of an happy immortality, must needs *alleviate* the weight of every affliction he suffers, and enable him to bear up, under the waftings of a *shatter'd, tottering* constitution, with *resolution* and *constancy*. And, surely, nothing can be more desirable than to have relief from *within*, when all is dark and gloomy *without* us.

FINALLY, the pleasures of religion are of all others the most *durable*. We carry them

SERM. them always about with us, ready for use  
 XIII. on every *emergency*. They are not enjoyed by starts, nor require, in order to their being relish'd, dull and tedious intervals of indolence, or *painful expectation*; but are a *constant* fund of delight. They never *sate*, never grow *flat* on frequent use; but rather more *strong, fresh, and lively*.

BUT do any of these excellent properties belong to the pleasures of the *Epicure*? Are they not *superficial* and *momentary*? Do they not end in *loss of appetite*, and a *stupid listlessness* at least, if not in confusion and remorse? Does not a too frequent repetition of them render them *heavy* and *unentertaining*, and, sometimes, quite *nauseous*, till the spirits are recruited and the senses recover their former quickness? Will they not forsake us at death, and leave us entirely destitute of comfort in the eternal world? What then can be more wild and extravagant, than for a man to purchase them by debauching his *reason*, and forfeiting his *honour*, with the loss of his *innocence* and *peace*; and the pleasures of religion that will  
 con-

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continue *for ever*, and be only *reviv'd*, SERM.  
*enlarg'd*, and *perfected*, in the future state? XIII.

—CONSIDER this, be wise, and *shew*  
*yourselves men*.—Give up the *base* and  
*unworthy* gratifications of vice and sensu-  
ality, for the *refin'd* and *godlike* enter-  
tainments of virtue; for the *calmness* and  
*evenness* of an upright mind; and the  
*exalted* pleasure of doing good.—Ex-  
change the satisfactions of a *brute* for the  
joys of *angels*.—Be ambitious to partake  
of the happiness of *God himself*.—  
This *reason*, and every principle of *gene-  
rosity* strongly dictate: Nay, consult even  
your *self-love*, and that will direct to it.  
But if, for the sake of irregular enjoy-  
ments, which are *short-liv'd*, *uncertain*,  
and *superficial*, you sacrifice the *noblest*  
and *purest* pleasures that human nature is  
capable of; your *folly* and *wickedness* must  
be both inexcusable.



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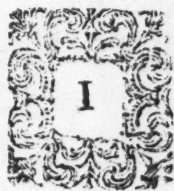
## S E R M O N XIV.

Religion founded on reason, and  
the right of private judgment.

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JOSH. xxiv. 15.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve  
the LORD, choose ye this day  
whom ye will serve, whether the  
Gods which your father served  
that were on the other side of the  
flood, or the Gods of the Amo-  
rites, in whose land ye dwell :  
But as for me, and my house,  
we will serve the LORD.*



IN the former part of this chap-  
ter, *Joshua*, having assembled  
the tribes of *Israel* together  
at *Shechem*, gives them a brief  
history of the astonishing acts of God in  
their

SERM.  
XIV.

SERM. their favour, from his first appearance to  
XIV. *Abraham*, to their settlement in the promised land. He recounts the call of *Abraham* from idolaters, to the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, with a view to preserve, amongst his posterity, the grand principles of religion pure and uncorrupted; the unsettled condition of their great progenitor in the land of *Canaan*; the oppression of their ancestors in *Egypt*, and miraculous deliverance from thence by the hands of *Moses* and *Aaron*, who were enabled to prove their commission by such awful credentials, as not only humbled the pride of the *Egyptian* king, and struck terror into all his people, but were the fullest evidence of the supreme universal dominion, and irresistible power of the God of *Israel*; and finally his wonderful conduct and support of them in the wilderness, his destroying the idolatrous nations that set themselves to oppose their passage, and fixing them, at length, in the possession of that good land, which he had promis'd to give them for an inheritance. And from this series of  
fur-

surprising providences, *Joshua* argues, in the 14th verse, the obligations they were under to *fear the LORD*, to *serve him in sincerity and truth*, and renounce all the idolatry of their *fathers*. But because it was necessary that their religion should be free and voluntary, he refers the matter entirely to their own determination, upon a review of the reasons which he had offered, only declaring for himself and his family, that they would adhere to the acknowledgment and worship of the true God, whatever choice the rest of the people might make: *And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose ye this day, whom ye will serve, whether the Gods whom your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me, and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

'Tis remarkable, that in this passage, *Joshua* takes it for granted, that if the *Israelites* revolted from the true God, they would fix in some form of religion or other; and not turn absolute *atheists*, and cast off all religion. And indeed, the



SERM. character of an Atheist would hardly be  
 XIV. thought possible to happen amongst man-  
 kind, who are reasonable creatures, did  
 it not appear in fact, that some have so  
 darkened and defaced the reason of their  
 minds, as to dispute *first* principles, to  
 question even the existence of a Deity,  
 and banter the obligations of religion and  
 virtue. From whence we learn, that as  
 human nature is capable of a vast enlarge-  
 ment of its faculties, and of attaining to  
 high degrees of moral perfection and ex-  
 cellence, it may also be sunk into the  
 lowest state of corruption and degeneracy.  
 For the evidences of a supreme and so-  
 vereign intelligence, the creator and go-  
 vernor of the world, appear plainly  
 every where. Earth, sea, and air bear  
 the strongest testimony to this fundamen-  
 tal truth: *The heavens likewise declare  
 the glory of God, and the firmament shew-  
 eth his handy work.* By the existence of  
*effects*, we are necessarily led to the ac-  
 knowledgment of an eternal *first cause*;  
 and the giving being to such an infinite  
 variety of creatures, the supporting and  
 animating universal nature, the admirable  
 order,

order, and exquisite uses of the several SERM.  
parts of it, the preserving such an im- XIV.  
mense frame of things in constant and  
perfect harmony, making even the mi-  
nuteſt parts ſubſerve the beauty of the  
whole natural ſyſtem, and the general  
good of the moral world; theſe, I ſay,  
are the cleareſt demonſtrations of the *in-*  
*finite wiſdom* and *power* of the Deity.  
And from his infinite wiſdom, which muſt  
inform him at all times what is fitteſt  
to be done, and his infinite power ena-  
bling him with eaſe to effect it, and con-  
ſequently his conſummate and immutable  
happineſs, we may certainly infer his *mo-*  
*ral perfection*; nay, that he is a being  
of *absolute* and *necessary* moral perfection;  
who can have no temptation to violate  
any of the eternal rules of righteouſneſs,  
truth, and goodneſs, but will always pur-  
ſue what is beſt upon the whole. And  
the duties which *more immediately* relate  
to this ſupreme mind, naturally ariſe from  
the notion of his *absolute* perfection, and  
universal preſerving and governing provi-  
dence; as do theſe of *juſtice* and *chari-*  
*ty* from the circumſtances, and neceſſities

SERM. of mankind, and the relations in which  
 XIV. they mutually stand to each other; and  
 the obligation to *temperance* and *self-government*, from its necessary subserviency to the above-mentioned great and indispensable duties, and to the rectitude of our rational nature.

WHAT can we think of the man then, who denies and reviles these plainest dictates of reason?—Who believes that a world, the parts of which are in a continual *flux*, and undergo innumerable *changes*, is a *self-existent* and *necessary* system;—Or that a world, which has in its frame and structure characters of the highest *wisdom*, and most curious *design*, was formed by *chance*,———or that it can preserve itself, and is independent on him that made it;——that mankind, who are *reasonable* and *free* beings, and consequently *moral* and *accountable* agents, are bound by no *law*, and have no inspector and judge of their conduct;——that he who endued them with moral powers will take no cognizance whether they are *improved*, or *neglected* and *abused*;——and that virtue and vice are  
 mere

*and the right of private judgment.* 351

mere *empty names*; ——— What, I say, SERM.  
can we think of the man who maintains XIV.  
such gross absurdities, in opposition to  
the plain nature of things; and the al-  
most unanimous sense of his fellow-crea-  
tures, but that he is an *irregularity*, a  
sort of *monster* in the human species,  
(whose distinguishing excellency it is that  
they are rational) and as such not fit even  
to be *supposed* to exist, till apparent and  
undeniable facts declare it? I proceed  
now to propose some other useful obser-  
vations from the text, as the subject of  
my following discourse. And,

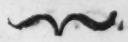
I. I observe that religion is a *voluntary*  
thing, and a matter of *choice*. Accord-  
ingly we find, that *Joshua* left it to the  
*Israelites*, if it seem'd *evil* to them to  
*serve the LORD*, to *choose*, for them-  
selves; *whom* they would *serve*; in which  
he acted as one who had a just know-  
ledge of human nature. For mankind  
are beings endued with *reason* and *liberty*;  
and *this alone* makes them capable of re-  
ligion and virtue. Without these powers  
they would be upon a level with brute  
creatures, and 'tis the *right* or *wrong* ex-



SER M. exercise of them that constitutes the *moral*  
 XIV. *good*, or *evil* of actions; as will appear  
 from the following considerations.

A MAN may have a good *natural disposition* to justice, beneficence, a sober and orderly behaviour, to meekness, peaceableness and the like; but tho' these are important branches of a religious conduct, the *natural disposition itself* is not religion, but the *preferring* it to the *contrary* temper, and *cultivating* and *improving* it by those helps and motives which religion affords for that purpose; any more than a *natural tendency* to peevishness and sudden passion is vicious and sinful. The one is a misfortune like a *bodily defect*, or a *sickly constitution*, but can't be deem'd a proper fault, because 'tis *unavoidable* and *necessary*; and for the same reason the other, which, so far as it springs entirely from nature, is equally necessary, cannot be virtuous, or, in a *strict* sense, rewardable.

AGAIN, what just foundation for praise is there in a man's being of the *true* religion, a *Christian* suppose, by *chance*? without knowing the grounds of his religion,

gion, or the reason of his hope? merely SERM.  
because his *ancestors* were Christians, and XIV.  
Christianity is the *established* religion? *i. e.*   
upon the same foot as he might have  
been of a *false* religion, a *Mahometan*, or  
an *Idolater*. Such a man's faith, tho' by  
a *fortunate accident* of the most excellent  
kind, is no more a virtue than a good  
*natural complexion*, or the happy *situa-*  
*tion* and *temperature* of the country where  
he was born. Indeed the truths, which  
he was thus *born* to the knowledge of,  
may be of great use to him, as they  
may be the foundation of a more perfect  
morality than they can be expected to  
arrive at, who are destitute of such ad-  
vantages, whose lot is cast in the more  
dark and uncultivated parts of the world;  
but the *faith*, from whence these better  
morals proceed, has, considered in itself,  
no more real merit in it than the *igno-*  
*rance* of an uninstructed infidel. Whereas  
not only the *morality*, but the *faith* of  
one, who is of the true religion from con-  
viction and choice, is virtuous and com-  
mendable, because it is acquired by the  
exercise and improvement of his rational

SER M. faculties; and on the contrary, the *er-*  
 XIV. *rors* which such a person may fall into,  
 after proper care to avoid them, and sin-  
 cere endeavours, in the use of all the  
 necessary means to come to the know-  
 ledge of the truth, will not be of any  
 great *consequence* in themselves, nor *dan-*  
*gerous* to his happiness. So that, in many  
 cases, 'tis better to *err* with an honest,  
 unbiass'd, inquisitive mind (for this is  
 oftentimes the natural effect of human  
 infirmity, where there is the *best* tem-  
 per, and a true *rectitude* of the will and  
 affections) than to be in the *right* from  
 custom, and an implicit reverence for  
 tradition and authority; especially, if  
 with a sound and orthodox faith, there  
 be join'd a narrow disposition, neglect of  
 free and rational enquiry, pride, preju-  
 dice, and censoriousness, which are the  
 direct and immediate sources of *error*,  
 but can be of no possible service to the  
 cause of *truth*.

BUT farther, that our religion is only  
 so far praise-worthy, as it is the matter  
 of our *choice*, is evident from hence;  
 that a man may perform an action that  
 is

*and the right of private judgment.* 355

is in itself *good*, for example, an act of *beneficence*, and yet if he does not choose to do it as a *kind, beneficent* action, but from some other motives in which *religion* and *virtue* are not concern'd, it will not be a *virtuous* action; nay, it may be done from such principles, and to answer such purposes, as are evil and sinful, and then, taken in all its circumstances, it will be a *wicked* action; and the more so, because it is abusing an action that is good in itself\* to serve so vile an end. On the contrary, if a sincerely religious man does an action which is in itself *evil*, with a good design, and especially, if through *mistake* he thinks it his duty, the honest intention may be perhaps in some degree his excuse; but how far it may be pleaded must be left to the decision of the supreme and righteous judge of the world, who alone knows what *negligence* or criminal *prejudice* was the occasion of the erroneous judgment of his mind, and consequently, how far his present ill conduct, tho' pursu'd with *upright* views, is owing to a preceding *wrong choice*. And,

Since



SERM.

XIV.

SINCE it so plainly appears that religion, as it is the means of procuring for us acceptance with God, must be a *voluntary* thing, it necessarily follows that every man has an undoubted right to *judge for himself*, what form or method of religion is most rational, and agreeable to the divine will. For how can his religion be the result of his *free choice*, if he be not allow'd to *choose* for himself *at all*, in matters of religion; nay, if it be not left absolutely to his own determination? *Restrain* this liberty, and you *destroy* it. There is no doing the matter by *halves*; but a man must either judge *entirely* for himself, or *another* must judge *entirely* for him: There is no *medium*. The former of these is the true state of the case, as has been already shewn; and it is evident farther from this consideration, that every man is, in his own frame and constitution, a *moral* agent, and an *accountable* being, and consequently must be left to think and act, as his own *private judgment* directs. His choice must be *uncontroul'd*; and no power upon earth has a right to compel him

even

even to a profession of the *true* religion. SERM.

WHETHER the civil magistrate has a right to punish *Atheists*, and such as deny the obligations of all religion, natural and reveal'd, as long as they behave like good subjects, and peaceable and useful members of society, may be justly questioned: This enquiry, however, is not to our present purpose, my business at this time being only to prove, that he ought to leave every man to the quiet profession of that religion, which his own judgment and conscience approve, and not to use *forcible* methods to bring any to the acknowledgment of the *establish'd* religion. And if what I am now arguing against be a part of the authority of the chief magistrate as *such*, it must belong to the supreme power of all nations *equally*; and consequently it must be the office of the magistrate to propagate, by force, *heathen idolatry* in heathen countries, the *Mahometan superstition* in Mahometan countries, as well as *Christianity* in Christian countries; *i. e.* since this power essentially belongs to his office, it must be his duty to establish by violence both the  
*true,*

SERM. *true*, and *false* religions; or, in other

XIV. words, to do things which are *contradictory*, and *repugnant* to each other.

To say that he has only authority to compel men to embrace the *true* religion, will make no real difference in the case; for if we will not entirely destroy his *coercive jurisdiction*, that can be nothing else than what the civil magistrate, in every particular country, *thinks* to be *true*. And where there are several powers, all *equal* and *independent*, who claim to be the patrons and defenders of the *true* religion, which, in fact, deserves that character, can only be determin'd either by a serious, free and impartial examination of the *pretensions* of *each* (a thing not to be expected in the present case, since it is this very liberty that is suppos'd to be *restrain'd*) or by an *immediate revelation* from heaven.

AGAIN, the use of force can be of no service to true religion, because it cannot convince the judgment, nor consequently make *real converts* to it; but has a tendency to encrease *fraud* and *hypocrisy*, which is utterly inconsistent with  
reli-

religion. Such a method is likewise highly dishonourable to *truth*, as it puts it upon the same foot with *falsehood* and *imposture*. And, SERM.  
XIV.

FINALLY, the office of the magistrate is to defend the properties and civil immunities of the subject, and to secure and promote the public good; and therefore he must be bound to restrain and punish those vices, which are a violation of mens natural rights, destructive of the order and happiness of society, and tending to public confusion and ruin. But what business can he have to meddle *beyond* this? Or to enquire into the speculative *opinions* of those who behave in an honest inoffensive manner, and contribute their part to the general good? Into opinions that are not *detrimental* to the *peace* of the community? For 'tis the *ungovern'd passion*, the *bitterness* and *contention* which attend religious controversies, that do all the mischief, and not *mere difference* of opinion. And I am persuaded, had the civil power interested itself less in mens *religious* enquiries and disputes, the world would have



SERM. have been much more *peaceable* than it  
 XIV. has been; and we should not have had  
 so many *unintelligible, absurd* and *extravagant* doctrines claiming to be parts of true religion, nor consequently so much *infidelity*; nor, I believe, so great a variety of sentiments as have abounded, especially in the Christian world. For a rational and free enquiry is much more likely to produce *uniformity* of opinion amongst sober and considerate men, than imposition and violence. So that upon these accounts it appears, that religion, which is a *personal* thing, and entirely a *voluntary* obligation, ought to be left *free* to every man's reason; and that the civil magistrate, instead of *restraining* the liberty of private judgment, is bound to *protect* all his subjects in it, as much as in any other of their *natural rights*, against all encroachments whatsoever.

LET me add, before I conclude this head, that as it follows, from religion's being a matter of *choice*, that every man has a right to judge for himself which is the *true* religion, and the most acceptable method of serving God; so likewise,  
 that

*and the right of private judgment.* 361

that he ought to use all those means, SERM.  
which the providence of God hath put XIV.  
in his power, in order to make a *right*  
choice. For *choice*, or giving the *preference*, supposes that that which is the object of it is the *best* of the kind; but how can men judge what religion is *best*, or consequently make a *rational* and *deliberate* choice of it, if they are not *impartial* and *diligent* in their enquiries? Of this I shall have occasion to say something more under the next observation; to which I now proceed.

2dly, WE may infer from the text, that no man can be obliged to embrace a religion that is *evil*, i. e. contrary to reason, and the moral fitness of things; but, on the contrary, is bound to reject it. *If*, says *Joshua* to the *Israelites*, *it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose ye this day whom ye will serve*; by which he plainly intimated, that if the religion, which the God of *Israel* enjoin'd, had been really *evil*, i. e. unfit, and unreasonable; it would not only have been *lawful*, but their *duty*, to have looked out for some better scheme. And indeed

SERM. the thing is so clear in itself, that I need  
 XIV. not say much to illustrate and confirm it.  
 I shall do it therefore, briefly, by an instance or two.

IF any scheme of religion undermines the perfections of God, which the reason of our minds can demonstrate from certain principles, it cannot be *true*. For example, if it represents him as an *arbitrary* being, who acts without regard to the reason of things, not only in the distributions of his bounty, but in his government of moral agents; as an *unjust, tyrannical* being, who has clogg'd the happiness of mankind with insuperable difficulties, and made it depend either upon their *believing* or *doing* impossibilities; or as an *angry, revengeful* being, who delights in cruelty, and in the misery and destruction of his creatures. And the same may be said of any other descriptions of the Deity that derogate from his *absolute perfection*, which is the necessary foundation of all true religion. Again, that scheme of religion must necessarily be *false*, and ought to be rejected with *detestation*, which *dissolves* or *weakens* the obligations

obligations to universal purity, and tends SERM.  
to licentiousness and vice; which indulges XIV.  
to sensuality, censoriousness, revenge, and  
encourages violence, persecution, &c. be-  
cause virtue is of eternal and unchange-  
able obligation, and the above-mentioned  
and all other vices are unsuitable to hu-  
man nature, and the established order of  
things; and, finally, such an evil scheme  
ought to be abhorr'd, because it is destruc-  
tive of the moral rectitude and happiness  
of mankind, which it must be the design  
of all true religion to support and ad-  
vance, and in which the perfections of  
the Deity are most gloriously display'd:  
And the allowing that it is mens duty to  
reject any pretended revelation, that con-  
tradicts the principles of natural religion  
and morality, can be no prejudice to the  
cause of *Christianity*, nor hinder its being  
acknowledg'd and reverenc'd by consider-  
ate and impartial minds: If it could, I  
own that this would be an *insuperable ob-*  
*jection* against the Christian institution.  
But its doctrines are perfectly consistent  
and rational, and its precepts most wise,  
just, and good: It gives us the noblest



SERM. ideas of God, recommends the most strict  
 XIV. and universal virtue, and inforces the  
 practice of it by the worthiest and strongest  
 motives; and is excellently adapted to promote private perfection and happiness, and the order, peace, and well-being of societies: It will therefore stand the test of the exactest judgment, and bear the most *severe* and critical, provided it be likewise an *honest* and *impartial* examination: Nay, the more thoroughly it is consider'd and enquir'd into by the light of uncorrupted reason, the more its morals are compar'd with the most perfect systems of *philosophy*, or with the morals of other *real* or *pretended* revelations; the more will it shine and be distinguish'd for its excellence, as an institution of all others most perfective of true goodness, most worthy of God, and useful to mankind.

It can't be thought after this, that, by what has been said, I intend to insinuate that all religions are *equal*, and that 'tis indifferent whether a man chooses the *true* religion or a *false* one: For our sentiments of things, or giving the preference  
 to

*and the right of private judgment.* 365

to one thing above another, will not alter SERM.  
their *real nature*. Truth will still be XIV.  
truth, and falshood falshood, whatever  
mens judgments and determinations are.  
The true religion will be worthy to be  
*receiv'd*, though it should happen to be  
*universally rejected*; and an evil scheme  
of religion to be *rejected*, tho' it should  
be *universally receiv'd*. And though re-  
ligion must be a *voluntary* thing, and a  
matter of *choice*; it is however our duty,  
in order to the making this choice, to  
be *diligent* and *impartial* in our enquiries.  
For the great Author of our nature hath  
endued it with such faculties as are *pro-*  
*per* to distinguish betwixt truth and error,  
and appear to have been given us for  
this very purpose. There is also a fix'd  
and certain *standard* of truth in the reason  
of things, which, in all cases of impor-  
tance, and necessary influence upon our  
happiness, is sufficiently clear and explicit  
to *well-dispos'd* minds. If therefore we  
indulge to a lazy indolence, and suffer  
our *judgment*, and consequently our *choice*,  
through prejudice and vicious affections,  
to be abused and perverted, we are justly

SERM. liable to blame and punishment. And  
XIV. again, though we may with safety reject  
~~~~~ a religion that is unreasonable, that patronizes vice, and is dishonourable to Almighty God ; yet it must be allow'd, that, in order to our being able to judge whether it deserves that character or no, we must *carefully* and *calmly* examine it : And, consequently, if, for want of due enquiry, occasion'd by a prejudice in favour of our vices, by a regard to worldly interest, or by any other evil principle, we reject the true religion under the notion of falshood, our *believing* that we *may* and *ought* thus to reject it will not excuse us. For so far as our not knowing our duty is *voluntary*, and springs from the *non-improvement* of those capacities and advantages for better information, which God, in his providence, has conferr'd upon us ; so far as it arises from the want of an *honest unprejudiced* mind, and of exercising that *care* and *diligence* in our enquiries, which may justly be expected from *rational* and *moral* agents ; so far as our not seeing what it *becomes* us to see is not owing to a *weak* and *insufficient* light,


and the right of private judgment. 367

light, but to *listlessness* and *indifference*,^{SERM.}
and the influence of *ungovern'd appetites*; ^{XIV.}
we are, in the sight of God, chargeable
with *wickedness* and *insincerity*, and, con-
sequently, liable to the effects of his dis-
pleasure.

3dly. WE should learn, from *Joshua's*
example, to be faithful to the cause of
God, and the interest of religion and vir-
tue, even in times of most *general* corrup-
tion and depravity. He bravely resolved to
adhere to the worship of the true God,
tho' the whole body of the *Israelites* should
revolt to idolatry; *as for me and my house,*
we will serve the LORD. And the same
ought to be the conduct of every reason-
able men, *viz. inflexibly* to pursue what
he is convinc'd to be his duty, whatever
the practice of *others* may be, and what-
ever they may *think* or *say* of him. Sin-
gularity, in things indifferent, may gene-
rally perhaps be an argument of *weakness*
and *folly*, or of unbecoming *stiffness* and
obstinacy; but men have carried the argu-
ment much too far, when they have paid
so great a compliment to *custom*, as to urge
it against the practice of *virtue itself*. For

SERM. the obligations of virtue are upon no con-

XIV. siderations whatsoever to be dispens'd with,
 much less for a piece of *foolish fawning complaisance*; and a man of reason would never consent to do a thing that was *really* dishonourable, for the sake of avoiding *undeserv'd* reproach.

INDEED if virtue and vice were merely *arbitrary*, and had no difference in the nature of things, 'twould be unreasonable to be *singular* in what is now call'd virtue, when what is call'd vice came in *fashion*, and had the *character* and *reputation* of virtue: Nay farther, one would comply in things *lawful*, with the general prevailing humour of mankind, rather than look *odd* and *particular*, though it was somewhat contrary to one's own inclination. But what man in his senses would consent to corrupt and dishonour his nature, and make himself miserable, only because others did the like? Is a mortal distemper the less cautiously avoided because 'tis *epidemical*? Are not the obligations we are under to the great Author of our being, to the law of our reasonable nature, and to preserve our integrity,
 of

of the *first* importance? Does not the *rectitude* and *happiness* of the moral world necessarily depend upon fulfilling those obligations? And is it not then our wisdom to be inflexible in this cause, tho' all men should *desert* and *reproach* us? Or shall we sacrifice this, which is the highest interest of human nature, to the passions, prejudices, and wickedness of an *unthinking, deluded, and degenerate* world? SERM. XIV.

AGAIN, to dare to be *singularly good* is an argument of great resolution and strength of mind, and of a confirm'd and establish'd virtue: For such must that virtue be, which repels the contagion of *ill examples*, and flags not at *reproaches* and *ill treatment*. And I doubt not but such a character appears *brave* and *heroic* in the history of *Joshua*, or of any other persons in *former* ages, even to those, who, in very corrupt times, are induc'd, by the force of custom, or to justify their own practice, to censure and exclaim against it as precise and enthusiastical: which shews, that their objection is not so much against the *thing itself*, as against the *odium* and *scandal* that may attend it.

SERM. But surely we may be sufficiently fortified
 XIV. in this respect, by considering, that while
 we thus conduct ourselves, we act suitably
 to the dignity of our reasonable frame,
 and conform to the example of the su-
 preme being, whose goodness is *constant*
 and *invariable*; and that such a *steady in-*
tegrity will render us approv'd of by this
 most excellent being, and be recompens'd,
 hereafter, with everlasting honour and
 happiness.

I SHALL conclude all with observing, that
 the design of *Joshua*, to use his utmost
 credit and influence with his more *imme-*
diatè dependants, for the support and main-
 tenance of *religion*, was truly *noble* and *ge-*
nerous; and what it will be highly for the
honour of every one of us to imitate. For
 it won't bear a serious dispute, which is the
 most *amiable* character, which the most
useful member of society, which the *best*
 parent, and head of a family; he that en-
 deavours to instruct those under his care in
just and *worthy* notions of God, and leads
 'em on to virtue by an *exemplary* behaviour;
 or another, with the same natural accom-
 plishments, or acquir'd excellencies, and
 of

and the right of private judgment. 371

of the same rank and situation in the world, SERM.
who leaves his children and servants to XIV.
the *full swing* of their licentious appetites, ~~~~~
is not at all concern'd about cultivating and
improving in their minds sentiments of
piety, and a regard to *good morals*, or,
which is much worse, first *debauches*, and
then *hardens* them in wickedness, by his
own *irregular* life.



S E R-



S E R M O N XV.

The evidence of a future state, on
the principles of reason and re-
velation, distinctly considered.

2 T I M. i. 10.

---Who hath abolished death, and
hath brought life and immorta-
lity to light through the gospel.



I T is observable in almost all SERM.
controversies, whether of great- XV.
er or lesser importance, that
both sides are apt to run in-
to extremes, in the heat of their oppo-
sition to each other. Men are seldom in-
clin'd

SERM. clin'd to consider the principles of their

XV. adversaries as of a *mixt* nature, partly

right and partly wrong (which yet is very often the case) but seem rather to think, that they ought to keep at the greatest *distance* from them that is possible, and that all *concessions* are dishonourable, and a betraying the cause of truth. I might illustrate this by a variety of instances, but it will be more to my present purpose to confine myself to one of the most considerable, and that is, the grand dispute about the powers of *reason*, and the advantages and uses of *revelation*.

ON the one hand reason is magnified as a plain, distinct, and sufficient rule in *all* circumstances; and a particular external revelation, to fix and explain the principles and obligations of morality, is represented as absolutely *needless*, and, consequently, unbecoming the infinite wisdom of God, who can do nothing *in vain*. On the other, revelation is not only describ'd as expedient and useful in *certain* circumstances, but strictly *necessary*; and reason as a blind erroneous guide, that is incapable

able *in itself* to direct mankind to the true knowledge of God, or give them just notions of their duty and happiness. Again, the advocates for the *strength* and *perfection* of natural reason are apt to talk of it, not only as affording clear and strong evidence of a future state of rewards and punishments *in general*, but even of a state of *immortality*; and that, therefore, we have very little, if any, advantage from *revelation*, with respect to this great and important article, beyond what we may receive from that *original light*, which is implanted in every man's mind. On the contrary, some defenders of revelation imagine, that nothing of this can be allow'd without diminishing its authority and excellence; and that reason is not only dark and confus'd with respect to the soul's *immortality*, but gives no probability of *any future state*. Both these, in my judgment, carry the matter *beyond* the truth; and would, perhaps, have fix'd in some *middle* opinion, if their thoughts had been intirely *disinterested*, and they had not had in view the maintaining and supporting

SERM. a *particular scheme*. For let reason be,
 XV. *in itself*, and if *rightly exercis'd*, ever so
 ~~~~~ sufficient to instruct mankind in religion  
 and good morals, a revelation will be  
 nevertheless desirable and beneficial, when  
 it is actually *corrupted* and *darkened*, and  
 the world is over-run with ignorance and  
 superstition. In like manner, it can be  
 of no possible disservice to the cause of  
 Christianity, to suppose that *reason* might  
 have discover'd a future state, any more  
 than to allow that it has reviv'd the  
 knowledge of other *natural* truths, which  
 though founded in reason, and capable of  
 being known by it, were, however, in a  
 great measure *obliterated* and *lost*. Besides,  
 it is generally thought, in most other  
 cases, to be one of the chief excellencies  
 of revelation, that its most essential and  
 important doctrines are agreeable to what  
 the *light of reason itself* teaches. And  
 shall the *same* thing be deem'd a dis-  
 paragement to it in this particular in-  
 stance? Let the belief of a future state  
 be a dictate of *nature*, revelation will be  
 still highly serviceable to mankind, by  
 removing

removing all *uncertainty* and *confusion* in their reasonings about it, and rectifying *weak* and *superstitious* notions dishonourable to God, and hurtful to solid virtue; by greatly encreasing, and adding to the probability of a future existence in general, and giving particular assurances of a happy *immortality*, which to reason is obscure and doubtful at best, if at all probable. I shall only add, that by denying there is any foundation in reason for the belief of a future state, we take away, from those who disown revelation, one of the strongest motives to a virtuous practice; which is, indeed, no direct proof that the principle itself is *wrong*, but may justly incline us to *suspect* it; or, at least, should make us proceed with *deliberation* and *caution*, before we venture to determine in a matter of so great consequence, and not suffer us to be *hasty* in forming a conclusion, that may be dangerous to religion, and the happiness of the world. To set this matter in a clear and full light, I shall do these two things:

SERM.

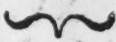
XV.

I. CONSIDER what evidence *natural reason* affords of a future state. And,

II. SHEW the great advantage we receive from *Christianity*, with respect to this important principle; by which it will appear, that notwithstanding the discoveries which reason may make, and the intimations we find of it in the writings of the *Old Testament*, it is reveal'd in so much *plainer* and *stronger* manner, that it may, with great propriety, be said to be *brought to light through the Gospel*.

I. I AM to consider what kind of evidences there are of a future state from *reason*. And, in general, we can pretend to nothing more than *probability*; and when this is all that the nature of the case will admit of, every thinking man will be determin'd by it in *religion* as well as in the *common affairs* of life; and it must be unreasonable to the last degree, to insist on *demonstration* and *strict certainty*. The next point to be settled is, what must pass for *probability*; which is the  
more



more necessary to be considered, because SERM.  
men's not fixing the true nature of it, XV.  
and blending proofs of a different kind,   
partly *probable* and partly *demonstrative*,  
even where *demonstration* can't justly be  
expected, seems to have occasion'd all the  
obscurity and confusion in their specula-  
tions on this subject.

THE chief ground of all our arguings  
for a future state are the *moral* perfec-  
tions of God; and these are generally  
suppos'd to be *certain* principles, that  
reason can demonstrate. Now if this be  
allow'd, I am not at all oblig'd, when  
I am only forming a *probable* conclusion,  
to shew that any particular principle is  
*necessarily* *inferred* from these perfections,  
because then it will not be barely *probable*,  
but *certainly true*; nor that the contrary  
is *absolutely inconsistent* with them, for if  
so, it will not be *probably*, but *certain-  
ly false*. All that I am concern'd to  
prove is, that what I maintain is *most*  
*agreeable* to the ideas of the divine wisdom  
and goodness; and this must be allow'd  
to be *probable* evidence, tho' I can't re-  
duce the other opinion to a *direct* *absur-  
dity*,



SERM. *duty*, or else *probability* will be the same

XV. with *demonstration*. Again, in our reasonings about probability, we must judge upon what *appears* to us, and not suspend our belief because we don't know *all the circumstances* of things, or *all the ends* that an infinitely perfect being may have in view. For *probabilities* subsist in their full force, and will influence the conduct of every wise and considerate man, notwithstanding *possibilities* to the contrary. And there must be allow'd to be a great probability in the argument before us, if the notion of a future state be shewn to be most agreeable to the *constitution* of man, to the *moral attributes* of God his supreme Governour, and the *present condition* and *circumstances* of human nature. This I shall briefly examine. And,

1<sup>st</sup>. IF we consider the nature of mankind, we shall find that they are *reasonable* beings, capable of discerning the difference between good and evil, of understanding that particular law, whatever it be, by which they are to be govern'd, and the weight and importance of the several motives which urge  
to

*from reason and revelation.*

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to the observation of it; that they are SERM.  
likewise *voluntary* agents, who are nei- XV.  
ther by their internal frame, nor by any  
foreign influence, necessarily determined  
to virtue or vice; and consequently *moral*  
and *accountable*, capable of being govern'd  
by laws, and *rewarded* or *punish'd* for  
their behaviour.

THE next thing to be consider'd then  
is, whether God, their supreme Gover-  
nour, has actually given them *a law*, by  
which to direct and regulate their con-  
duct. And, in general, it is highly pro-  
bable that there must be some law of *in-*  
*telligent* natures, as there are in the *ani-*  
*mal* and *material* world: For doubtless  
the great Creator design'd them for some  
*end*, as he did, evidently, the various  
systems of insensible matter; otherwise,  
the most perfect parts of the creation are  
the most useless and insignificant. Now  
no creature can answer an *end* but by  
*means* adapted to it, which are the *law*  
of its nature. So that some *peculiar laws*  
are as necessary to be suppos'd for *rational*  
*self-determining* beings, as the *laws of mo-*  
*tion* in the *material* world: And the dif-

SERM. ference only lies here, that whereas mat-

XV. ter is govern'd by *necessary* laws, and *necessarily* determin'd to its effects; rational and free beings are capable of directing their own conduct, either in *conformity*, or *opposition*, to the law of their nature; which (as I observ'd before) renders them *accountable* for their behaviour, and proper subjects of *reward* or *punishment*.

THE general law which men are under is in short this, to do whatever is suitable to their *intelligent nature*, agreeable to the *relations* in which they are plac'd, and to their *rank* and *station* in the world, and what will best answer the *end* of their being, so far as it respects *themselves*, or *the whole community of mankind* of which they are members; and, consequently, to subject all the inferior appetites and passions to the conduct of reason, which is the *noblest* and most *perfect* principle, to do nothing but what *becomes* the *dignity* of their frame, nothing that will *dishonour* and *debase* it, to practise *reverence*, *love*, *submission*, and *gratitude* to God, and imitate his moral character by  
the



the exercise of *justice, meekness, peaceable-* SERM.  
*ness, universal benevolence, fidelity, and all* XV.

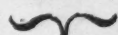
other *social* virtues, on which the order and happiness of the world depends : And this I call a law which God has given to mankind, because whatever appears to be *a rule*, arising from the establish'd constitution of things, with reference to the actions of the creature, can be no other than *a law* in the design of the Creator. Let us now proceed to enquire, in the

2d PLACE, Whether it be not most reasonable to suppose, that God, as the *wise* Governour of mankind, will reward or punish their behaviour, in obeying or disobeying the law of their trial. And, in general, to imagine that he takes *no notice* of the conduct of his creatures, and is determin'd to make *no difference* at all between the virtuous and the vitious, represents him as having but little regard to the *order and harmony*, or even to the *happiness* of the rational world ; and seems very *unsuitable* to his wisdom and goodness, in the character both of their *father and governour* : And if he makes *any* difference, which all our notions of him



SERM. lead us to expect, the same reasons must  
 XV. induce him to do it in *every* instance. For  
 if it be not fit to reward virtue and punish vice in *particulars*, and consequently, proportionably, in *every particular*, it can hardly be a point of wisdom and goodness upon the whole. And from hence it undeniably follows, that no virtuous man can, upon the whole, have *less happiness* than one that is vicious; for in this case, virtue would, in effect, be *punish'd*, and vice *rewarded*.

BUT to give this argument its full strength, it may be proper briefly to state the *true foundation* of the divine rewards and punishments. The rewards, bestowed by the great Creator on his creatures, are not the result of any proper *merit* in them; nor his punishments the effect of *passion* in himself. Punishments I therefore suppose to have, chiefly, a *medicinal* design, in order to correct the disorders of mankind, and to have their foundation in the *wisdom* of the great Governour of the world, because they are proper to check the growth of vice, and maintain the authority of the divine laws and government;



ment; and rewards to be founded in his *wisdom* and *infinite benevolence* towards his creatures, which inclines him to communicate happiness to all, who are *rightly dispos'd* and qualified for it. The sum of the argument then will stand thus. The design of God, in all his dealings with men, is to promote their *happiness*. He has given them laws, the observation of which has not only a *certain* tendency to their happiness, but is *necessary* in order to it.—It is therefore reasonable to be suppos'd, that he will take the most effectual methods to secure the *general purpose* he has in view, which is the *good* of his creatures. — This can't be obtained without *a conformity* to the laws which he has given them.—These laws will not *probably* be obey'd, unless they are inforc'd by the sanction of *suitable rewards* and *punishments*. — And therefore the wisdom of his government seems to require that he should make use of these, since they are the *most proper* means to answer his end. So that *rewards* and *punishments* appear to have the same reason and foundation with *government itself*,

SERM. viz. to prevent that *moral evil*, which all

XV. good laws are design'd to restrain, and which is directly *opposite* to, and *inconsistent* with, the supreme happiness of mankind. To this let me add, that in order to serve these wise purposes, the rewards and punishments must be such, as, it may reasonably be expected, will *support* virtue in the present imperfect and corrupt state of human nature, and *counterballance*, in some proportion, the influence of animal passions, and the weight of worldly temptations. The only point therefore that remains to be determin'd is,

3dly, WHETHER all this, which, it has been shewn, may justly be expected from the wise Governour of the world, is actually done *in the present life*. And the contrary is in a manner self-evident, and scarce needs illustration. For not to mention what is obvious to the common sense of mankind, that there are, and have been in all ages, multitudes of *virtuous* persons, who have enjoy'd less happiness in this life than *the most vicious*, whose wickedness has not only depriv'd their own minds, but



*from reason and revelation.*

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but been extremely injurious to the order SERM.  
and peace of society (which if there be XV.  
a foundation for the rewards and punish-  
ments at all, as has been already prov'd,  
ought not to happen in any one instance)  
not to insist longer on this, I say, if we  
take the present state of the world as it is  
upon *the whole*, it has not *one mark* of a  
state of equal and impartial *retribution*,  
but every thing that might fairly be ex-  
pected in a state of *trial*.

For here good and evil are *indifferently*  
dispens'd; and there is *one event* to the  
just and the unjust, without any *particu-*  
*lar*, or, at least, *frequent* interposition, to  
vindicate the righteous man's cause; or  
punish his wicked oppressor. Men of *di-*  
*stinguish'd* vice are high in honour, and  
possess the largest affluence of worldly  
riches and grandeur, and attain it, often-  
times, by *treachery*, *oppression*, *perjury*, and  
other *base* and *unrighteous* methods; while  
persons of *singular* and *unblemish'd* virtue  
are loaded with a heavy weight of cares,  
and abandon'd to poverty and contempt.  
Nay they are sometimes despis'd, robb'd  
of the esteem of their fellow-creatures,  
depriv'd



SERM. depriv'd of the necessaries and conveni-

XV. encies of life, abus'd and persecuted, even  
 for their *goodness*.——And do these righteous men seem to have receiv'd their *reward*? —— That reward which is reserv'd for them by a God of *infinite benevolence* and *mercy*.——Or that reward, which the *all-wise* governour of the world is determin'd to confer, for the *encouragement* and *support* of virtue?——On the contrary, can we suppose the affluence of prosperity, the height of honour, the ease and plenty which the wicked enjoy, are design'd as *penal evils*, to deter others from the practice of vice?——Can that be call'd a state of *reward* for virtuous men, which they groan under as an incumbrance, and from which they earnestly desire to be enlarg'd into a more free and active life?——Or can it be deem'd a *proper punishment* for those, who have no notion of happiness above it, and therefore center all their hopes and desires in it?

If it be said, that there is a sufficient distinction made between good and bad men, by the *natural good and evil consequences*

quences of virtue and vice: I answer, that, SERM.  
in innumerable cases, these natural con- XV.  
sequences are *obstructed*, or *evaded*, and in  
these there is properly *no reward or pu-*  
*nishment at all*: In others they are far  
from being *equivalent* to the outward ad-  
vantages the sinner enjoys, or the acciden-  
tal disadvantages the good man labours  
under; and in all such instances, *virtue*  
may upon the whole be said to *suffer*,  
and *wickedness* to be *triumphant*. And  
considering in how great a degree, the  
difference that there really is between  
good and bad men, with respect to hap-  
piness and misery, springs from *the be-*  
*lief of a future state*; how frequently it  
happens, that there is no reward or pu-  
nishment *seen*, much less a *full and equal*  
retribution; and that the *natural good*  
and *evil consequences* of virtue and vice  
are neither so *remarkable* in themselves,  
nor so *universal*, nor so *certain*, as, it may  
reasonably be expected; will *support* a  
*steady* inflexible integrity under discou-  
agement and oppression, and *counter-*  
*ballance* the strong allurements of worldly  
honour and pleasure; upon all these ac-  
counts,

SERM. counts, I say, we must either conclude,  
 XV. that there will be a state of more *impar-*  
 ~~~~~ *tial* retribution hereafter, or else, which  
 I have shewn to be highly improbable,
 that God does not concern himself to
 make *any* difference between the righte-
 ous and the wicked, or at least not so
universally or in such a *degree*, as to pro-
 mote the grand design of rewards and
 punishments, maintaining and enforcing
 the practice of virtue, and giving a check
 to corruption and *moral* disorder *.

WE may add, to strengthen the *proba-*
bility of a future state from the *wisdom*

* I know but one thing more, that can invalidate any
 part of the argument contain'd in this discourse, and that
 is, that 'tis *unnecessary* to assert a state of rewards for good
 men after death, because if we allow the future punishment
 of the wicked, that *alone* will make a *sufficient distinction*
 between them, and answer all the ends of the divine go-
 vernment.—But to this scheme there seems to be an *insu-*
perable objection, *viz.* that it supposes the *several* degrees
 of virtue to be *equally* rewarded, or rather *none* of them
 rewarded; nay, that those which are most *difficult*, at-
 tended with the *fewest* pleasures, and the *greatest* incon-
 veniencies, and are, withal, of *extraordinary* service to
 mankind, receive the *least* reward, *i. e.* in truth, are *dis-*
courag'd, instead of being distinguish'd and honour'd. And
 whether it be possible to reconcile this to the ideas of *su-*
preme wisdom and goodness, or indeed to the *common prin-*
ciples of equity, I leave to the judgment of all impartial
 enquirers.

and

from reason and revelation.

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and *goodness* of God our supreme Gover- SERM.
nour, the *moral* and *accountable* nature of XV.

man, the *confusion* and *disorder* and *promiscuous* distribution of good and evil in the present life, that it agrees, vastly better than the contrary supposition, with our general idea of the *excellency* of human nature, and the *greatness* and *extent* of its faculties. For upon taking an impartial survey of human life, under its present embarrassments and difficulties, can we really imagine that it is the *whole* of our being, the *only* state we are design'd for? Can we reconcile our minds to the thought, that man, who is indu'd with such *noble* powers, and capable of such *vast* improvements, was intended by the great Creator to be confined to this *narrow* and *imperfect* scene of action? Does it seem agreeable to our notions of the infinite goodness of the Deity, to suppose that he was made for no *higher end*, than to struggle and labour, for a short space, under the inconveniences and miseries of this uncertain and troublesome world, and then to lose his existence? On the contrary, is he not, consider'd in this view, one of the most

unac-

SERM. *unaccountable* parts of the creation ; form'd

XV. with larger expectations and prospects than other animals are capable of, only to *disquiet* and *torment* him? Does he appear with that *honour* which is suitable to his character, as a being possess'd of such *superior* qualities, and made after the *image of God*? No: but as an *insignificant diminutive* creature, of very little consequence in the universe ; a *mystery* in the course of providence, that it will ever confound and puzzle his reason to explain. Whereas, if we suppose that there is a state of much higher perfection, for which human nature is design'd, it will appear like itself, truly *great* and *excellent*. And if from the *nature* of things we may, as doubtless we may with *some* probability, guess at the *original scheme* of the Creator in forming them ; the *active* and *improveable* nature of the mind of man, which is so cramp'd and limited in its operations in the *present* state, speaks it to be intended for *another life*, where its faculties will be enlarg'd ; and it will be employ'd in such exercises, and enjoy such pleasures, as are suited to its *importance* and *dignity*. Having laid before you, briefly, some of the *natural* evidences

evidences of a future state : I proceed to SERM.

shew,

XV.

2dly, THE advantages we receive from *Christianity*, with respect to this important principle ; by which it will appear, that notwithstanding the discoveries *reason* may make, and the intimations we find of it in the writings of the *Old Testament*, it is reveal'd in a so much *plainer* and *stronger* manner, that it may, with a great propriety, be said to be *brought to light thro' the gospel*. Suffer me just to premise, that the assurances, which the Christian religion gives of a future life, are a strong presumption that our *natural reasonings* about it are *just* and *conclusive*. For as it appears in fact, that God is determined to dispense the rewards and punishments of virtue and vice hereafter, we may be assured, that this is *most agreeable* to the wisdom, goodness, and justice of his government ; and consequently all our arguments for it, from his absolute perfection, and the consideration of him as the wise and righteous Governour of mankind, from the powers of human nature, and the present scene of things, are hereby

cor-

SERM. corroborated and confirm'd; and shewn not
 XV. to be the wild suggestions of *fancy* and
 ~~~~~ *enthusiasm*, but the sober dictates of *right*  
*reason*. However, the advantages we re-  
 ceive by Christianity are still very *consider-*  
*able*, and prove it in this respect, as well  
 as others, to be of the greatest use and be-  
 nefit to mankind. For,

1<sup>st</sup>, By the Christian revelation we have  
 a much stronger probability *of a future*  
*state in general*, than we could have by  
 mere unassisted reason. The *natural pro-*  
*bability* is exactly the same, as it would  
 have been if there had been no revelation;  
 and with this is join'd *another proof* of a  
*different* kind, as *strong* as the evidence  
 we have for the truth of Christianity:  
 These two proofs are not at all *inconsistent*,  
 but the latter removes all the *uncertainty*  
 that might attend the former, and greatly  
 increases the evidence upon *the whole*; like  
 two credible testimonies to the same fact,  
 which *mutually* strengthen and confirm  
 each other. The testimony of *one* honest  
 and capable witness, to the truth of a  
 thing that fell within his own observation,  
 may be thought *sufficient*; but the addi-



tion of *one* or *more* witnesses, of equal SERM.  
capacity and integrity, must render the XV.  
probability more *full* and *unexceptionable*. 

AGAIN, Christianity assures us of the  
*resurrection* of the body (divested of all  
gross and animal principles, and in a state  
of glory and incorruption) to be a means  
of pleasure and happiness to the mind,  
which is a point that *reason* was absolutely  
in the dark about; and has given us *an*  
*instance in kind*, a glorious and uncontest-  
able *specimen* of a resurrection and future  
life, in the resurrection of Christ. Then  
it not only establishes the *general notion*  
of a future existence, but asserts, in the  
strongest terms, the soul's *immortality* and  
an *eternal* reward for the righteous, con-  
cerning which, though of the utmost con-  
sequence to the comfort of mens minds,  
and the cause of virtue, the dictates of  
reason are at best *imperfect* and *confus'd*.  
And tho' the *Jews* were favoured with  
a revelation from heaven, and therefore  
among them, one might justly expect  
clearer and fuller discoveries of *eternal life*;  
yet, notwithstanding this, the law of *Moses*  
has nothing in it of this kind, but is in-



SERM. forced only by general assurance of the  
 XV. divine favour, and promises of *temporal*  
 rewards ; and there are very *sparing* intimations of a future *immortality*, even in the writings of the Prophets.

ADD to all this, that the reward, which the gospel proposes, is of the *noblest* kind, honourable to God, and worthy the excellent powers and capacities of human nature : It consists, under the continual influence of the divine presence and favour, in the perfection of *reason* and *purity* ; is *an inheritance undefiled*, into which nothing of vice or misery shall enter ; a state where *charity never faileth*, and, consequently, of eternal harmony and peace, and the most exalted social happiness ; in which the *whole* human nature shall shine in its highest lustre and dignity, the spiritual part being compleatly *refin'd*, and fitted for the *sublimest* employments and pleasures, and the body so *adapted* to it, that, instead of *cramping* the rational life, it shall rather *assist* its most enlarged operations.

I SHALL conclude all with this single remark, that if there are any here present,

sent, who are prejudic'd against the *Chri-* SERM.  
*stian revelation*, on account of the clear XV.

discoveries it makes of a future state of rewards and punishments, they must be convinc'd, that they can reap but little advantage by rejecting *Christianity*, because the thing in general, how terrible soever it may appear, is a principle *the light of reason* dictates. Let it be allow'd, that the evidence for it amounts to no more than a good degree of *probability*, it ought however to determine the practice of every rational man.—For what but *probability* is the chief spring of human actions?—Do not *credible* testimony, probable opinions and prospects, nay frequently *suspensions* and *remote* consequences and conjectures, influence all the affairs of the world; and direct mens conduct in cases of the last importance to *themselves*, their *families*, and *civil society*?—It ought therefore undoubtedly to decide in matters of religion, which is the most momentous of all our interests: And a man, in the opinion of every impartial spectator, would behave to the highest pitch of extravagance,

SERM. who should act *against* probability, as he

XV. must do if he is not *determin'd* by it,

when an eternity of happiness is depending. So that he who gives himself up to the gratification of irregular appetites, and a course of vice and impurity, can never be secure, even tho' he destroys the authority of the *Christian revelation*, unless he can also extinguish his *reason*, erase out of his mind all notions of a *Deity* and a *Providence*, and, consequently, subvert the principles of *natural religion* likewise.

I HAVE argu'd only upon the *supposition* that there are such persons, because to take it for *granted* that there are really any who are acted by this vile principle, and have such a degenerate and monstrous turn of mind, would be the greatest *affront* I could offer to this audience. For to say that a man is *prejudic'd* against what is the truest, exaltation and happiness of his nature, is, in effect, to assert, that all remains of reason, all wise and good impressions, are totally lost and obliterated in him. He that can wish to die like a *brute*, can't have the *spirit* of a

man ;



man; and there is no *baseness*, no *vil-* SERM.  
*lainy*, but we may justly suppose him ca- XV.  
 pable of. Besides, what do his notions

*tend* to? — Do they raise the *value* of  
 human nature, or improve its *happiness*?

—— Do they contribute to the regularity  
 and order of *private life*, or the peace  
 and welfare of *society*? — Will they

make him at all more *useful* in the world,  
 a more *faithful* friend, *tender* husband,  
*affectionate* and *careful* father, or more  
*industrious* and *honest* in his business?

Quite the reverse of all this. — They  
*degrade* and *vilify* human nature; —

raise none but *gloomy* and *horrid* ideas in  
 a considerate mind; — and lead to *li-*  
*centiousness* and *disorder*. Let us there-

fore thankfully cherish the glorious hopes,  
 which the gospel affords, of *an immortal*  
*existence*, in which we shall enjoy the per-

fection of honour and happiness. Let us  
 look on this state only as *preparatory* to  
 our future more sublime and blissful life;  
 and train ourselves up for it by cultivat-  
 ing our reason, and the practice of uni-  
 versal righteousness and virtue. I shall  
 leave with you, to this purpose, the words



400 *The evidence of a future state, &c.*

SERM. of St. John; Beloved, now are we the sons  
XV. of God, and it doth not yet appear what  
we shall be: But we know, that when he  
shall appear, we shall be like him; for we  
shall see him as he is. And every man who  
bath this hope in him, purifieth himself,  
even as he is pure.

*1 John*  
iii. 2.





## S E R M O N XVI.

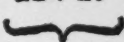
The nature, folly, and danger of  
scoffing at religion.

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2 P E T. iii. 3.

*Knowing this first, that there shall  
come in the last days scoffers,  
walking after their own lusts.*



Discourse on this subject can SERM.  
need no apology with any XVI.  
one that knows the world,   
and has observed what open  
attempts have been made (and conducted  
sometimes with a great deal of art and  
subtilty) not only to disgrace and under-  
mine revelation, but natural religion itself;

SERM. and propagate such *base, unworthy, and*  
XVI. *groveling* sentiments of human nature, as  
have a direct tendency to root out of  
mens minds every principle of honour  
and ingenuity, and destroy the very foundation of all good morals. Some there are, even among ourselves, who endeavour to *palliate* and *soften* the vilest enormities, resolve the whole obligation of morality into *political contrivance*, and, with the scoffers mentioned by St. Peter, deride the *future judgment* of mankind; a state of rewards and punishments after death, as an *idle, romantic, visionary* scene, invented for the greater security of civil government, and supported by enthusiasm; and thus would fain banter us out of the two highest privileges of our reasonable nature, our *virtue*, and our *immortality*. I speak not these things for the sake of declaiming on the *looseness* and *degeneracy* of the times, or with a view to represent the *present* as more corrupt than *former* ages, in almost all of which, there have been some profess'd advocates for vice and licentiousness; but only to shew how necessary it is that we should  
each

each of us, in our several stations, endeavour to put a stop to the *progress* of this evil, which seems rather to be prevailing than losing ground amongst us, and has been long complain'd of by all those who have had a just concern for the honour of human nature, and the happiness of the world. To contribute my part towards it, and not to give *hard names*, or raise an abhorrence of any *particular characters*, farther than it is necessary to serve the cause of truth, was my sincere intention in composing this discourse: In which I shall

I. CONSIDER the nature, folly, and danger of the crime mentioned in the text.

II. ENQUIRE into the causes of it.  
And,

III. CONCLUDE with some suitable reflections.

I. I AM to consider the nature, folly, and danger of the crime mentioned in my text, *scoffing at religion*, than which nothing can be more offensive and shocking



SERM. ing to a considerate mind. It must in-  
 XVI. deed be own'd, that religion has had the  
 ~~~~~ misfortune to be monstrously *perverted*  
 and *misrepresented*, and that the most ab-
 surd and incredible doctrines, the wildest
 enthusiasm, and even such principles and
 practices as strike at the root of all mo-
 rality, have been urg'd and impos'd un-
 der that *sacred* and *venerable* name. And
 undoubtedly it must be a laudable de-
 sign, and of great service to mankind,
 to expose these gross corruptions, by which
 the *native* excellency and beauty of re-
 ligion is quite defac'd, and its usefulness
 entirely destroy'd. However, even esta-
 blish'd and popular superstitions are not
 to be treated with *rudenefs* and *scurrility*,
 but *calmly argued* against. For there is
 a decent respect due to the *religion* of a
 country, as well as to its *laws* and *manners*;
 and he who, instead of *reasoning* against
 particular errors, takes upon him to *revile*,
 and treat in a *ludicrous* way, what all around
 him have the highest value for, shews him-
 self to be an absolute stranger to the com-
 mon rules of civility, — and ought to
 be *despis'd* for his *insolence*. Besides, re-
 ligious

religious prejudices are, of all others, the SERM. most stubborn and inveterate; and there- XVI. fore, whoever attempts to reform them, if he knows any thing of human nature, will proceed with *discretion* and *gentleness*; and not in a *barsh, insulting* method, which must naturally irritate and inflame the passions, and render the prejudices of those whom he opposes yet more incurable. And all judicious enquirers will make a difference between religion as it is *in itself*, and as it has suffer'd by *accidental abuses*: For the former may, in every part of it, be rational, and highly beneficial, though the latter should be allowed to be absurd, unnatural, and hurtful; and, by necessary consequence, it may be an argument of a discerning mind, and both an honourable and useful undertaking, to endeavour to put a stop to the growth of *enthusiasm* and *superstition*, but unworthy a man, or a good member of society, to banter *religion*.

I AM inclin'd to treat such scoffers *decently*, and shall therefore suppose them capable of sober reflection: And taking this for granted, I would desire them to

SERM. ask themselves impartially, whether there

XVI. be any thing in true religion that is *really*
ridiculous? To begin with the grand

principles of natural religion. Is there any thing *ridiculous* in the belief of a Deity, a supreme, infinite, and intelligent mind, the creator and governor of the universe? Or is it more agreeable to *reason* to suppose, that the whole system of the world, which appears in fact to be subject to innumerable variations, is eternal and necessarily existent? Or that the regular, beautiful, and useful frame of nature, in every part of which there is display'd the most surprizing and curious workmanship, was jumbled together by chance, and not form'd by a wise cause? Is it *absurd* to assert, that he who made the world exercises an universal providence, and directs all the affairs of it; or that the first cause of all things is absolutely perfect, and, in a particular manner, the governor of the rational and moral creation, to whom he has given laws, and whom he has made by nature accountable? And upon allowing his absolute perfection and government of the world, what is there
ludicrous

ludicrous in any of the duties of piety, in a supreme reverence and love of him, and humble submission to the wisdom and authority of his providence, in celebrating his glorious excellencies, adoring his goodness, and acknowledging our constant dependance upon him? What is there that has a *ridiculous aspect*, or can excite any but *the laughter of fools*, in justice, temperance, probity, universal benevolence; in a strict inflexible integrity, and a disinterested, generous concern for the public welfare? And if in all these most essential principles and duties of religion there be nothing *wild* and *extravagant*, nothing *weak* and *trifling*, nothing, on the contrary, but what is truly *venerable*, *sublime*, and *useful*, he that endeavours to make a jest of them must render himself *contemptible*; and gives certain proof either of the *weakness* of his understanding, or of the *depravity* and *wickedness* of his heart.

AGAIN, is it at all *unsuitable* to our most worthy and honourable notions of God to believe, that when the world was universally

SERM.
XVI.

SERM. verſally corrupted, and over-run with ig-
 XVI. norance, ſuperſtition, and vice, and both

the knowledge and practice of the religion of nature were, in a great meaſure, loſt, he would graciously interpoſe for the good of his creatures, and teach them their duty by an *extraordinary* revelation? Or to aſſert, that the perſon, who was commiſſion'd to accompliſh this moſt deſireable end, wrought miracles to prove his authority, engage the *attention* of mankind, and counterballance their *prejudices*? Is it in the leaſt *irrational* to ſuppoſe, that this revelation has fix'd, with the utmoſt diſtinctneſs, the terms of our acceptance with God, and thereby remov'd *distracting* ſuſpicions, and *ſuperſtitious* terrors; and promiſed a *greater* reward, even an *eternity* of happineſs, a *greater* reward, I ſay, for the encouragement of virtue, than could be expected, with any good degree of probability, on the principles of natural reaſon? Or, finally, that beſides *the law of nature* reviv'd, it would enjoin two or three *poſitive* duties (guarding, in the ſtricteſt manner poſſible, againſt all *weak* and

and *dangerous* abuses of them) which are evidently calculated to enforce the eternal rules of morality, and a most exact and scrupulous regard to every branch of substantial and useful virtue?

SERM.
XVI.

It is possible, indeed, by an *unfair representation*, to make any thing appear ridiculous, be it ever so rational in itself, or of ever so much importance to the happiness of mankind. The putting *false colours* upon it, nay only the giving it an *odd name*, will have this effect with the thoughtless and inconsiderate part of the world. Thus rigid justice may be call'd *singularity* and *preciseness*;—acts of disinterested benevolence and generosity, *romantic heroism*;—and the love of God, *enthusiasm*. In like manner the being immers'd in water, or eating bread, or drinking wine,—if it be describ'd as an essential part of religion in itself, without reference to its moral use,—or as a charm, of I know not what mysterious and incomprehensible efficacy,—or as an atonement for an immoral conduct,—may well be reputed *weak* and *childish*. But when the *abuse* is discovered upon an impartial examina-

SERM. examination, and is clearly seen, that the
 XVI. ridiculer has only diverted himself and
 others with his own *ignorance* or *wilful*
misconstruction; wise and sober men must
 think very meanly of such a practice,
 and be surpriz'd to find it prevail in any
 companies, that have a concern for their
 own *honour*, and profess a regard, I need
 not say to *truth* and *virtue*, but to *com-*
mon sense and *decency*.

FURTHER, the grand principles and
 duties of religion are so far from having
 any thing *ridiculous* in them, that they
 are some of the *plainest* and most *obvious*
 dictates of reason, and there are no truths
 that, when justly represented, sooner ap-
 prove themselves to the unprejudiced
 judgment of mankind; which renders
 the *guilt* of the scoffer much more aggra-
 vated, and his *impertinence* and *folly* more
 insupportable. This is notorious with
 respect to the being and providence of
 God, and the intrinsic excellency and
 immutable authority of the rules of vir-
 tue, which no one can bring himself in
 earnest to oppose, without offering great
 violence to the reason of his mind. And

as to *Christianity* in particular, since it is the noblest improvement of morality and natural religion, and *so far* recommends itself; since all its *peculiar* doctrines are consistent and credible; since the author of this most rational and beneficial scheme was a perfect pattern of *innocence*, open, generous, and humble, free from every appearance of *ambition* and *craft*, and gave the most convincing proofs of his being sent from God, by numerous and unquestionable miracles; *real* miracles, above the *known* power of nature or art, nay, probably, above any powers communicated or allowed to *created* agents; miracles *publicly* performed, and on *vast multitudes* at once, and on *sudden emergencies*, where there could be no suspicion of a concerted fraud; and, generally, most *useful* miracles, which were not mere ostentations of the superior power and wisdom, but demonstrated likewise the goodness of their author; upon these accounts, I say, it may justly be asserted, with respect to the *Christian revelation* in particular, that it deserves the approbation of impartial enquirers, or at least to be

SERM.
XVI.

SERM. oppos'd with *modesty* and *respect* ; and that

XVI. to decide against it *confidently*, and treat it with *rudeness* and *contempt*, notwithstanding all these plausible circumstances, and strong presumptions of its truth and divinity, is *weakness* and *insolence*.

LET me only add, that religion is of the utmost consequence to the comfort of mens minds, the peace of society, and the general good of the world. What, for instance, can be a more *pleasing* reflection, than to consider ourselves, and the whole universe, as under the conduct of a being of unerring wisdom, inflexible justice, and unlimited goodness ? On the contrary, if we discard the notion of a Deity and a Providence, we can have none but *dark* and *gloomy* prospects ; our happiness or misery being to be determin'd either by a *blind, random chance*, or by *fix'd and irrevocable fate* ? Again, what can be more *honourable* to human nature, than the notion of a future immortal existence, in which our rational faculties will be refin'd and enlarg'd ? or what stronger motive to the practice of virtue, which has a necessary and inseparable connexion
both

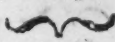
both with *private* and *social* happiness; or SERM.
 more powerful dissuasive from vice, which XVI.
 tends to the corruption and misery of
individuals, and the dissolution and ruin
 of *public communities*? And if we sup-
 pose that the distinction between virtue
 and vice is only imaginary, and has no
 foundation in reason and nature; has not
 this a most direct tendency to introduce
all manner of confusion? Upon this scheme
 societies would be so far from being hap-
 py, that they could *scarce subsist*: For if
 the exercise of the social virtues was re-
 garded as a mere matter of *private con-*
venience, the greatest *strength* and *security*
 of civil government would be destroy'd:
 So that whoever sets himself to vilify these
 important truths, and represent them in a
 ridiculous light, not only fixes certain *re-*
proach and *infamy* upon himself, by *mis-*
placing his ridicule on what has really no-
 thing absurd in it; he not only shews him-
 self to be a *slight* and *careless* observer,
 that never examin'd to the bottom of
 things; but is, in fact, whatever his in-
 tention may be, whether to gratify a *trifl-*
ing humour, display the *forwardness* of

SERM. his genius, or corrupt the *morals* of the
 XVI. age, an enemy to *society* and the *general*
 ~~~~~ *happiness* of mankind \*.

AND as the *guilt* of these scoffers is very great, their *danger* is in proportion. For if the principles of religion should happen to be *true* (and the *vainest* and most *confident* unbeliever won't, surely, pretend to prove that this is *impossible*) he that has so *monstrously* abus'd his reason, that noblest gift of God, as to employ it against his maker, and all that is amiable and useful in human life, must expect to be treated with the utmost *rigour* and *severity*. Having consider'd, thus largely, the nature, folly, and danger of *scoffing* at religion; I proceed to the

\* I would not be understood, by this, to insinuate, that even such persons ought to be punish'd by the civil power. On the contrary, as *these enemies* may be entirely defeated by *reason*, and the mischief they are capable of doing prevented, 'tis my firm belief that *forcible methods* are altogether *unnecessary*, and must, of consequence, be extremely *dangerous*. For the allowing the magistrate to interpose in matters of *opinion*, where there is no *direct* violation of the peace of *society*, only for fear of *remote* and *possible* consequences (of which he must be the sole and absolute judge) will lay a foundation for all manner of *violence* and *persecution*.

2d THING

2d THING propos'd, which was to en-<sup>SERM.</sup>  
quire into the causes of it. These causes <sup>XVI.</sup>  
are *various*. 

It sometimes springs from a *levity* of mind; which disposes men to treat all subjects *ludicrously*. Instances of this kind must have fallen, more or less, under every one's observation; I mean the persons, who are incapable of *cool* and *sedate* reflection, and so fond of a *jest*, that they can't help giving way to it on the most *solemn* occasions. They are profess'd enemies to all that is grave and manly, and therefore treat *religion*, as well as their *friends*, and those to whom they are under the highest obligations, with the utmost *freedom* and *impertinence*.

AGAIN, bantering religion frequently proceeds from *ignorance* and *superficial enquiry*. 'Tis an excellent remark of a most ingenious author, that "a little  
" philosophy disposes mens minds to  
" *Atheism* \*." Because they understand not the works of nature, their admirable composition, and various uses, they grow

\* Lord Bacon.



SERM. *profane and sceptical*; and are apt to urge

XVI. *their own mistakes*, arising from the shallowness and confusion of their understandings, as so many *defects* and *blemishes* in the constitution of the universe: They have just sense enough to *cavil*, but not to *discern* and *display* the glories of the creation, and the amazing wisdom and goodness of the creator. And it is for want of a right knowledge of *human nature*, and of the *fitness* and *beauty* of actions and characters, that so many attempts have been made to confound virtue and vice, and destroy the obligations of morality.

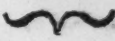
BUT this cause of scoffing is most notorious with respect to *reveal'd* religion. The *inconsistencies* of party-schemes, the *dreams* of bewilder'd enthusiasts, the *innovations* and *corruptions* of weak, superstitious, and designing men, are blended with the *original* doctrines of Christianity, in order to render it ridiculous. The *frauds*, *impositions*, and *persecutions* of dishonest, proud, tyrannical priests are objected to the very religion that *condemns* them; which, upon this account, is all represented as the effect of *priestcraft*, combin'd

combin'd with the cunning of *statesmen* SERM.  
and *politicians*, with a view to enslave and XVI.  
impoverish the rest of mankind. Consult  
the writings of the enemies of Christianity,  
or join in their conversations, and you  
will find, that the *shrewdest*, most *popular*,  
and constant invectives turn upon such  
topics as these, which evidently proves  
that they are not always very *exact* and  
*careful* in their religious enquiries, that  
they proceed on *false* principles, and cen-  
sure what they have no *just idea* of, and  
are not quite free even from that *prejudice*  
and *implicit faith*, which they loudly dis-  
claim for themselves, but are so forward  
to charge upon others.

SOMETIMES again it happens, that the  
*fashion* of the age they live in, or the  
*general humour* of the company they fre-  
quent, makes persons set up for *scoffers*.  
To give themselves a *genteel* air, and ac-  
quire a character of *politeness*, they are  
induc'd to deride all religion, if the genius  
of their company be so *bold* and *uncon-*  
*fin'd*, or if it be more *moderate*, only re-  
velation. At other times the same effect  
may be ascrib'd to *vanity*. Men are de-

SERM. firsous to *distinguish* their names ; or fond  
 XVI. of displaying their *wit*, and talent at *ri-*  
*dicule*. Whereas, in truth, there is no  
*wit* at all in *misrepresenting* things, but  
 rather a strong presumption of *ignorance*  
 and *stupidity* ; and when any proceed so  
 far, as to make a jest of God and his pro-  
 vidence, to plead for the privilege of dy-  
 ing like brutes, and banter the obligations  
 of virtue, which are a law to all intelli-  
 gent beings, such a conduct is a certain  
 proof, that reason is, in a great measure,  
*extinguish'd*, and the mind lost to all *good*  
 and *generous* impressions.

BUT this leads me to observe, in the last  
 place, that scoffing at religion may, in  
 some persons, proceed from a *direct*  
*hatred* of it, occasioned by a prejudice in  
 favour of their vices. This was the case  
 of the *scoffers* mentioned in the text, who  
 are expressly describ'd as *walking after their*  
*own lusts*. To this, likewise, our Saviour  
 imputed the ill treatment he met with  
 from the principal men of the *Jewish* na-  
 tion. I shall not pretend to determine, that  
 it is, *always*, the cause of infidelity in the  
 present age ; because I make no doubt  
 but

but mens judgments may be *unhappily* SERM.  
perverted, even in points of great im- XVI.  
portance, where there is, in general, an   
*honest* temper and habit of mind. This  
however I may safely venture to assert,  
that vice and immorality in the practice  
is the source of the *stoutest* and most *in-*  
*vincible* prejudices against religion; and  
that there is an *immediate connection* be-  
tween a wicked irregular life and *bating*  
the truth, nay, *opposing* the truth with the  
utmost *bitterness* and *virulence*. Suffer me  
to pursue this observation a little, which  
is of great consequence in *morals*, and will  
serve very much to illustrate the subject  
before us.

How natural is it for those, who live  
*as without God in the world*, to *wish* that  
there was no such being, that, by destroy-  
ing the first principle of all religion, they  
may justify the want of it in their prac-  
tice: Or if the proofs of his existence are  
so evident and uncontestable, as not to be  
disputed, much less suppress'd, the next  
thing they are inclined to believe is, that  
there is no *providence*; and if they can  
satisfy themselves in this point, they get  
rid

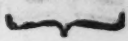


SERM. rid of the troublesome notion of an in-  
 XVI. *spectator* and *judge* of their actions, and are  
 left to follow, *freely*, the bent of their  
 licentious inclinations. A principal part  
 of God's providential government, if there  
 be any such thing, is the government  
 of *moral agents*, which, as it supposes that  
 they are under a *law*, supposes likewise  
 that they are *accountable* beings, and will  
 be *rewarded*, or *punish'd*, according to  
 their obedience or disobedience to that  
 law; and this future state of *retribution*,  
 we may reasonably imagine, wicked men  
 can't bear the thought of, because it fills  
 the mind with confusion and terror, and  
 spoils the relish of their sensual enjoy-  
 ments; and, of consequence, they must  
 be enemies to the notion of God's *govern-  
 ing providence*, from whence it is so di-  
 rectly inferr'd. And farther, when per-  
 sons act as if there was no eternal law  
 or rule of *right*, making their irregular  
 appetites the sole guide and measure of  
 their conduct, they are *unavoidably de-  
 termin'd to wish* that virtue and vice were  
 but *empty* names, the invention of the  
*crafty* and *politic* to keep the world in  
 sub-

subjection, and impose on their ignorance SERM.  
and credulity; and that the distinction XVI.  
between moral good and evil was merely  
*arbitrary*, and did not spring from the  
immutable *reason* of things. So that a  
wicked life has a manifest tendency to  
beget a *dislike* of the great principles of  
*natural religion*, and inclines the mind to  
*question* their truth and authority. But  
because *Christianity* has fully establish'd  
the notion of a providence, and most  
clearly explain'd, confirm'd, and improv'd  
moral obligations, and declar'd the cer-  
tainty of future rewards and punishments;  
and as these things stand in this divine  
revelation, they are not so liable to be  
*disputed* and *perplex'd* as mere natural  
reasonings; it is no wonder if persons of  
corrupt dispositions and ungovern'd appe-  
tites take *particular* offence at *that*, since  
so long as the truth of our holy religion is  
unquestion'd, they can enjoy no *peace* or  
*security* in their vices.

I SHALL only add, that when men are  
*averse* to the principles of religion, they  
will naturally *decline* all farther enquiries  
into the reasonableness of them, and be  
*fond*

SERM. *fond* of every thing that looks *plausible* on  
 XVI. the side of infidelity. And the objections  
 they have gather'd together against religion will soon appear to the view of their passions and prejudices, which give an *unnatural* turn to all objects, and never represent them in their just *proportion*, very *great* and *considerable*: On the contrary, the arguments for it will lose all their *force*, and be esteem'd *weak* and *trifling*. Till, at length, by this monstrous way of *imagining*, instead of *reasoning*, they work themselves into a fix'd persuasion, that there is nothing at all in religion; and acquire *an habit of thinking* somewhat like a *principle*, that there is not in nature any solid foundation of virtue. And when they have thus conquer'd their *scruples*, or rather silenc'd the voice of natural conscience, suppress'd their sense of the difference of good and evil, and *perverted* their reason, to render it *subservient* and *compliant* to their passions, they are easily led on to make *violent* and *spiteful* attacks upon religion, and use their utmost cunning and sophistry to undermine it. This is the *deplorable* but too *evident* connexion between  
 vicious

vicious habits and opposing the truth ; SERM.  
till it settles, at last, in *rancour* and *malice* XVI.  
against it. 

WHAT has been said, in the foregoing discourse, suggests several useful reflections. We learn from it,

*Ist*, INTO what *extreme corruption* the mind of man, which is indu'd with such noble faculties, and form'd for Godlike perfection, is capable of being sunk, even to mistake *confusion* for *order*, and *deformity* for *beauty*; to have its reason employ'd as an *advocate* for *vice*, to paint it in *agreeable* colours, and set off the *shame* and *misery* of human nature with false and delusive charms; and in vilifying *religion*, and representing it as *ridiculous* and *unnatural*; *religion*, which is our chief honour and dignity, the only source of inward satisfaction, and the basis and support of social happiness, and which affords such ravishing prospects with respect to another life, as must make the most admir'd and envied scenes of worldly glory, pleasure, and luxury, appear mean and despicable.



SERM.

XVI.

AGAIN, that we may not be impos'd on by the scoffers of our own times, let us always take care to distinguish between *reasoning* and *ridicule*. There may indeed be reason in *ridicule*, but I believe it will generally be found, that there is a greater proportion of *falsehood* and *misrepresentation*. When therefore we are attack'd this way, as there is just ground for *suspicion*, we should examine nicely what it is that is *really* ridiculous; whether it be religion itself, or something of a different nature substituted in the place of it: The latter of these we may be satisfy'd will appear to be the case; for religion can't suffer by being *scrutiniz'd* any way, tho' our judgment concerning it may be debauch'd and corrupted. Of this indeed there will be but little danger, while we follow the method above recommended; otherwise, we may be banter'd out of our *senses*, and have no security against the most *dangerous delusions*.

FINALLY, that we may keep at the utmost distance from the crime mention'd in the text, let us employ our reason in

a *just* and *amiable* light. Let our *natural* SERM.  
*abilities* be devoted to this service, and all XVI.  
our *studies* and *improvements* made sub-  
servient to it. For the understanding and  
wit of man can't be more *suitably* or  
*honourably* exercis'd, than in describing  
virtue in its proper beauty or lustre, and  
stripping vice of those artificial orna-  
ments, which hide its natural horror and  
infamy; than in recommending justice,  
truth, and benevolence, and exposing the  
mischiefs of ungovern'd passions; than in  
tracing the footsteps of God's stupendous  
wisdom and unbounded goodness in the  
works of creation, the conduct of pro-  
vidence, and the wonderful scheme of our  
redemption. These are such *refin'd* and  
*exalted* speculations, as must always be  
our *noblest* entertainment, while we con-  
tinue possess'd of rational faculties. By  
pursuing this design we act in *concert*  
with the infinite wisdom of God, and  
the reason of all good spirits above us;  
do the *best offices* we are capable of to  
mankind; and for improving, in so wor-  
thy a manner, that *great* talent, which

is

426 *The nature, folly, and danger, &c.*

SERM. is the most *distinguishing* excellency of  
XVI. our nature, shall receive peculiar marks  
of approbation and esteem from the su-  
preme and almighty being, who is the  
*lover and rewarder* of virtue. To him  
be glory for ever. *Amen.*



*The End of the FIRST VOLUME.*



